OPTIMISM AND OTHER SERMONS

OPTIMISM
and Other Sermons

BY

ROBERT LAW, D.D.

Author of "The Grand Adventure." "The Tests of Life." "The Emotions of Jesus." "The Hope of Our Calling." Etc., Etc.

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PREFACE

IT is in response to a widespread public desire for at least another volume of sermons by the late Professor Law, that this book is put forth. Of the sermons published in "The Grand Adventure," Dr. Law says—"All of them are published practically as they were preached, no attempt having been made to modify the style, which, as I am aware, is better adapted to the pulpit than to the printed page." For the sermons and addresses in this volume, the same admission must be made. They are printed as they were delivered.

A note has been added to some of the sermons giving the circumstances under which they were preached. In the case of the addresses, this has not been possible, there being no indication on the manuscript, of the special purpose for which they were prepared.

T. B. McCORKINDALE,
EDITOR.

Deseronto, 1919.

THE REV. ROBERT LAW, D.D.: AN APPRECIATION

BY REV. T. B. McCORKINDALE, M. A.

I WISH to pay a tribute to the memory of my friend, the late Professor Law, of Knox College, Toronto, of whose services not only the Church, but the whole Dominion of Canada, was suddenly and unexpectedly bereft. To our sorrow and loss, he was taken away in the very zenith of his powers, at a time when it seemed to us we never more greatly needed his prophetic voice and his guiding hand. But, I think, he died as he would have wished to die, in the very midst of his work, ere his eye was dim, or his natural force abated.

It was my good fortune to hear the last sermon he ever preached. Little did I think, as I watched from my seat in Old St. Andrew's that virile, clear-cut face, instinct with life, and mobile with the play of thought and emotion—little did I think, as I listened to his fervid words, and wondered at the splendid workmanship of his discourse, truly the work of a master hand, that I would never again see in life those ex-

pressive features, or listen to that eloquence which was the admiration and, in a sense, the envy of every preacher.

On the next Lord's Day he was seized, one might say, on the very steps of the pulpit, with almost his first and what proved to be his last illness. Within eight days thereafter he passed to where beyond these voices there is peace.

First, let us consider him as a scholar. It is natural to do so, for in his erudition, which was far wider than most men dreamed, we find one of the secrets of his power as a preacher. While it is true that not every great scholar is a great preacher, it is also true that no one can be a great preacher without the gift of scholarship. This gift Dr. Law possessed in full measure. From his boyhood he was devoted to learning. He was not only a "lad o' pairts," to use a phrase of his own country, but an earnest student, graduating as Dux and Gold Medalist from one of the great public schools of Edinburgh, that city of splendid schools, and entering the Metropolitan University at an age when many a boy is struggling with the preliminary subjects. Equal diligence and success crowned his work at the larger home of learning. He took a most distinguished place at all his classes, in due time graduating M.A., and, in a few years thereafter, B.D., and this at a time when the latter degree was not so

much sought after as it is now. He completed his theological studies by a course at the famous University of Tübingen, which gave its name to a method of Biblical Criticism now exploded. But in the truest sense of the word, his theological studies were never completed. In his first charge, to which he was ordained at the early age of twenty-four, he gave one day a week to the study of Latin, another to Hebrew, and a third to Greek, which by degrees took the first place in his affections. All his life he was a member of a Greek Club. In his charge in Edinburgh which demanded much parochial visitation, he would come home at night, not wearied as most men would be, not with nerves jangling and out of tune as would be the lot of nearly all, but with an appetite whetted for his Greek play or his beloved Plato. Indeed, reading Plato with a few kindred souls was almost the only recreation he took during his strenuous years in Toronto. His knowledge of the Greek Testament was profound. One could scarcely ever quote a passage, without hearing an echo of the original murmured by him as he ruminated over the point in discussion. I have heard a report which I can well believe, that a student of Knox, taking Post-graduate work elsewhere, confessed he never knew how great a teacher Law was, until he sat at the feet of another. His eminence as an Exe-

gete was acknowledged by his Church in the Old Country when it appointed him Kerr Lecturer in 1909. His subject on this foundation was "The Tests of Life—a study in the first Epistle of St. John," which all scholars at once recognized as a work of rare expository value. His Alma Mater, always chary in the bestowal of her honorary degrees, shortly thereafter honoured him and herself by conferring on him the degree of Doctor of Divinity.

In referring to his scholarship, I have sought to show that he was not only gifted, but laborious. All his life he was a worker, and a hard worker. Every sermon bore evidence of high thinking and hard work. He ever gave of his best and nothing but his best, so that, as he closed one ministry after another in Scotland, his people would testify, that they never heard from him a poor sermon—a rare verdict, surely! Nor did he ever work harder than during these years he gave to the Church in Canada. They were, indeed, ten years of crowded life. Would that they had been less crowded—that he had occasionally relaxed—that, as in earlier days, the curling rink, or the golf course, or the bicycle had lured him from his study. He might have been spared to this new era that so greatly needs the prophetic insight, and the well grounded optimism of such as he.

THE REV. ROBERT LAW, D.D.

His pre-eminence as a preacher was acknowledged by every candid soul amongst his brethren. A minister of our Church in Toronto, with a magnanimity which only a great-hearted man could exhibit, confessed in Old St. Andrew's Church on the day of Professor Law's funeral, that his preaching was a revelation not only to the people of Toronto, but also to the ministry, inasmuch as it revealed the power the pulpit might become, when filled with such men as Dr. Law. Like most Scottish ministers, he took the work of preaching seriously, and the message of the Bible seriously, and the needs of his congregation and of the times, seriously. He was pre-eminently an expository preacher with a singular gift of applying Scripture to the needs of the hour. Again and again his sermons begin with a clear, and lucidly expressed exposition of his text and the contents. From this there begins the triumphal march of his discourse, gathering momentum as it moves majestically on; or, rather, let us say, on this foundation there arises a beautiful, chaste, and often magnificent structure, the work of an artist and architect, as well as a prophet. For indeed he was a prophet—a man of God—to us the beautiful name given to some of the holy men of old, a man who believed in God, lived near to God, who listened for the voice of God, who waited on the Spirit's prompt-

ing, who, to use an expressive phrase of one of the greatest of the teachers of Israel, was one of those admitted to the "council chamber" of the Almighty. Here, without a doubt, we find the true secret of his greatness as a preacher—his undoubting conviction that God is, that "there is a hand that guides," and a loving hand, the Father's hand—that not a sparrow shall fall to the ground without our Father—the theme of one of his greatest sermons. And, with the insight of the old prophets, he had their passion for righteousness, and their belief in the triumph of righteousness, even though at the long last. A faith and insight and passion like his, did not require the meretricious aids of fancy texts and fancy subjects—the refuge, too often, of the distressed seeker after popularity.

A prophet—he was also an Apostle of Christ. No man I ever knew had a greater love for our blessed Lord His sermons reveal that. He is never greater than when dealing with some great and gracious word or work of the Saviour of men. Then he rises to the heights of his most moving and most fervid eloquence. The theme seems to kindle his emotions, and his whole style glows with the fervour of a great devotion. Above all, his life revealed it. It was revealed in his unnumbered acts of kindness and charity, of which even his own family was ignorant. He

was not the man to speak of them, or let his right hand know what his left hand did. It was revealed in his life—in that quiet, dinified life of unostentatious goodness by which he adorned his Christian profession.

Some of his qualities as a man were, of course, patent to all who knew him as a preacher, teacher, and citizen—his integrity and rectitude, his high courage, industry, indomitableness. These are often found apart from the more genial qualities. But not in his case. He was an all-round man. We may say of him what a Latin poet said of himself, that nothing that concerns mankind was a matter of indifference to him. He could speak to any man on any subject that interested that man most. In his younger days he might have been often seen on the curling rink when the conditions were favourable, or on the golf course, or on his bicycle. He did not take his pleasure sadly, he enjoyed God's world. He enjoyed the company of his fellowmen. He enjoyed to hear, and also to tell a good story.

One of his indoor recreations was music—especially Church music. In his early days he acted as precentor in the Church, cultivating a refined taste for music among the members of the choir. In his later days he taught a singing class in Knox. Our new Book of Praise owes much to his talent, and taste, and wide knowl-

edge, both of hymns and Church-song. While he had a part in the ministry of Old St. Andrew's, it was one of the too few Churches in Canada where the music was of a distinctively Churchly type.

"Law was a great man," said one of his life-long friends to me—"Law was a great man." It was a short, simple, yet coming from the source it did, a significant biography. Like all truly great men, he was a man utterly without vanity. He bore without abuse the grand old name of gentleman. He carried his load of learning lightly, and it was only in intimate concourse one could get a glimpse of his vast erudition. He was quite fearless in his public speech,—never courting popularity. If it came to him, it was well: if it did not, it mattered not. His personal religion, as has been said, was quiet and unostentatious. Anything bordering on the sanctimonious was an abhorrence to him. Speaking little about religion, his life adorned the doctrine he professed. With a high sense of duty he was zealous in fulfilling it. He lived as ever in the Great Taskmaster's sight. It was his ambition, to use the words of one of his own texts, to please Christ his Saviour and to merit the words, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

DESERONTO, ONT.,
1919.

I.

OPTIMISM

THE subject on which I have thought it appropriate to address you is Optimism; for, though to speak on such a theme in Western Canada may look like carrying coals to Newcastle, the character of the times that are passing over us demands all the optimism it is possible for any of us to possess. In the first sense of the word, optimism is a natural quality, a disposition one is born with or without, as the case may be, a tendency to look on the bright side, to take a favorable view of circumstances and prospects. It is what is otherwise called the sanguine temperament; and this name at once suggests the close interdependence of body and mind in the make-up of our nature. A full tide of clean, healthy blood, circulating vigorously in body and brain and somehow irrigating the roots of thought and feeling, is the physical counterpart of this temperament. And, therefore, it is characteristically the gift of youth. Youth and health can scarcely be other than optimistic. Thank God for it! It is the rich warm blood

An address delivered at the Annual Convocation of the University of Manitoba, May 10th, 1918.

pulsing in the veins of our young men and women that keeps this otherwise old and withered world young, full of hope and joy; and secures that, as one generation of us is growing grey-haired and conservative, stiffened in our thoughts and ways, another is always rising up with fresh dreams and impulses, filled with a new wine of the spirit. Well that it is so! If life began with "Vanity of vanities" as its watchword, its current would be frozen at the source; if even with the chastened sagacity of age, it would come near to stagnation.

No matter that much of illusion is mingled with the optimism of youth; illusion has its place in the education of life. No matter that in many an instance Hope tells a flattering tale; whether real or illusory, it is Hope that keeps the world moving. No matter though life never turns out what any of us expects, but something better or worse, at any rate something different; were it not for the expectations we should never live at all. Even the little we accomplish we should never have accomplished but for the hopes that proved too great for accomplishment. If necessity is the mother of invention, optimism is the father of enterprise. Optimists are the advance-guard of all the great armies, of religion and philanthropy, science and civilization.

Yet this happy, courageous, generous tem-

perament is not without its defects and dangers. There is no temperament, indeed, on which our common speech showers so many disapproving epithets. Blind optimism, we speak of, and shallow optimism, cheap optimism, facile, credulous, unthinking optimism. And each of these epithets is a beaconlight warning the optimist of the rocks and shoals on which he is apt to make shipwreck. The radical vice of the optimist is to *ignore*. He reviews with pride his ten thousand men, but he ignores the enemy's twenty thousand. He does not reckon adequately with the stubborn, intractable nature of the material on which human effort has to spend itself. So the optimist is apt to be fickle and inconstant. He does not relish collar-work, the long pull and the strong pull. He pictures the path of his choice as one to be travelled easily, swiftly and pleasantly; and at the first taste of disappointment, the first hint of a lion in the way, his optimistic imagination flies off to another as promising more of the desired qualities. In business, the victim of this temperament hops from project to project; in other matters, such as education or hygiene, he becomes the devotee of every latest nostrum and fad; in philanthropy, is always pinning his faith to some new specific for washing the Ethiopian white; in religion, to a new doctrine or organiza-

tion or method which is to revolutionize the Church and the world. In short, the temptation that everywhere besets the optimist is the "short cut"; and soon as he is disillusioned about one he is apt to be fascinated by another. As the virtue of the optimistic temperament is its openness to new ideas, new personalities and movements, so its vice is to be for ever taking up with some new thing, and finding salvation in it because it is new.

All this may seem to suggest that optimism is a quality of doubtful value. But this would be a false inference. The practical value of optimism amounts to a necessity. Without something of it one might almost as well put up the shutters and close the business of living. Nor is it possible to possess too much of it. There cannot be an excessive optimism. The need is not to temper and dilute it with occasional admixtures of pessimism, but like every natural quality and power it needs to be *educated*. That is the second thing of which I wish to speak—the education of optimism.

Optimism, when it rises above the merely temperamental, becomes a fixed faith in the *optimum,* the best—faith in the best and hope for the best. And if you ask me what education is, I say that, more than anything else, it is the process by which, in any province of human

effort, we get an ever growing and deepening conception of the "best" in that province, and of the way to that "best." And what we call the education of a soul, of human experience as a unity, is the process by which we get an ever expanding and deepening conception of the ideal "best," the best for the whole empire of life. That education is given—one would rather not say it, but I fear it must be said—is in large measure given through disillusionment. Whether it be due to our fault or to our natural limitation—and no doubt it is due partly to both—the face of truth is unveiled to us by disillusionment. We are driven from the surface into the depths by disillusionment. And so optimism, while never changing its character as faith in the best, must always be changing its ground with our advancing conception of the best. In this, indeed, consists the difference between the optimism that is in process of education and that which remains uneducated. As in the first stages of prairie agriculture men are content to scratch the surface of the soil and scatter the seed and look for a crop, and when this fails some merely betake themselves elsewhere to practise the same naive kind of tillage, while others take to ploughing more deeply, and farming more scientifically where they are; so is it with the false and the true optimism. Some learn nothing by disillu-

sionment. They scratch the surface of life here, then they scratch it there, seeking still the same results by the same methods, their conception of the "best" still the same in its thinness and crudity. Others learn. Their optimism seeks a deeper soil in which to root itself; when the shallower springs run dry, it sinks an artesian well.

It is only thus that optimism can adjust itself to facts, especially to that fact which inevitably has so large a place in human life, the fact of failure. On the material plane, where we are set in conflict with circumstances, or in competition with our fellows for the prizes which constitute what is ordinarily called success, a proportion of failure is a mathematical certainty. Every business, every profession, has its disappointed men—and must have. Not even Canada is wide enough for a universal success of that sort; and if optimism were justified only by such success, it would be a precarious investment indeed, likely to leave on our hands a deal of bankrupt stock. But it is not so. Disillusioned perhaps, but with purged eyesight, optimism wings its flight towards the loftier realms of the Ideal: takes "sanctuary within the holier blue."

Yet it is here, not in the material arena, but where man is set against the challenge of the ideal, that the experience of failure is most inevitable. Here it is most surely true that, as Steven-

son says in his flashing, paradoxical way, "Our business in this world is not to succeed, but to continue failing in good spirits." A hard saying, but a true one. The artist's portfolio is full of unfinished sketches—failures. The minister's drawer is full of unfinished sermons—failures. The life-path of the best men and women is strewn with broken purposes, and aspirations never realized—failures. As Browning asks:

> Fail I alone in words and deeds?
> Why, all men strive, and who succeeds?
> What hand and brain went ever paired?
> What heart alike conceived and dared?
> What act proved all its thought had been?

Here we are all failures; every man worth his salt, at least, is a failure. I assume that we all believe in an ideal "best," and that in broad outline we all have the same conception of that "best," as not material but spiritual, as comprised in the great triad of Truth, Beauty and Goodness. I assume that we all consent to the fine saying of Keats, that the use of the world is to be the "vale of soul-making." But we hold this truth, not only with various degrees of clearness and intensity of conviction, we hold it with differences of meaning. Probably no two of us fill in the outline with exactly the same content. Granted that the supreme end is soul-making, what is the ideal soul, and what is the use of the

world for its making? Optimism is belief in the "best"; but what is the "best?" We may define it. We may say with Kant that it is the good will; but then what is it that constitutes a *good* will? We may say with the Christian that it is likeness to Christ, a character whose mainspring is love; but who knows the heights and depths and breadths of such a character? The "best" is not only an actually unfulfilled ideal, it is necessarily so. It recedes like the horizon as we approach it; and, if in the mundane sphere of effort, failure is never improbable, here it is inevitable. It is the mark of every true life that it signifies and intends more than it ever succeeds in actually being.

It may seem as if such a view of life is deeply tinged with pessimism; but in truth it is the optimistic, and the only optimistic view. Such a sense of failure comes not from our littleness but from our greatness. It is the sigh of the soul for its unrealized self. Not the publican, the self-confessed failure, but the self-praising Pharisee is the pessimist. Were there a man who should say that, being what he is, he is an ideal human creature—having attained and being already perfect—of all self-valuations his would be the meanest. Such a man would be wallowing in the depths of unconscious pessimism. It is he who says, "I am a failure," and is

conscious of it, who in truth rates himself highly. He is the optimist. It is to him that the limitless kingdom of the future opens its gates.

Here, then, is the mark of true optimism. Not only does it survive failure; it is educated by failure; it thrives on failure. A well-known artist has said that no picture is worth anything until it has been spoiled three times. What makes any picture great is gathered from the brink of failure. To gather the flower of victory from the brink of failure—that is the criterion and function of true optimism. There is in it an indestructible resiliency, an innate power of recovery, of revival, of resurrection, from disillusionment and apparent disaster and defeat. It calls men always to a winning fight, the one winning fight there can be, perhaps for all finite life, certainly for us—the fight of faith.

But if this is its criterion and its function, what is its source? Whence is this invincible faith in the "best," and the hope for it, derived? Optimism is not only a temperament or an attitude toward life; it is a philosophy, a creed. The education of optimism in individual experience is always related to larger movements in the thought and experience of mankind. The history of optimism in the larger sense, the history of man's expanding conception of the "best," and of the risings and fallings and resurrections

of his faith and hope in the "best" has yet to be written. It is even now at an acute stage of its making. The tragedy of the war has not killed optimism; but it has given a severe blow to *an optimism*. It has turned to something like ditch-water the heady drink with which for half a century the modern world has kept its spirits up. That optimism, in its main characteristics, has been evolutionary, materialistic, humanitarian. Its presupposition was a necessary and almost automatic evolution of human affairs in the right direction. The god of our idolatry was progress (spelled with a capital P). What we meant by it—progress towards what—we did not too closely enquire; but in the main we meant an ampler supply and a wider diffusion of the means of material well-being, to be brought about by more scientific exploitation and distribution of nature's wealth. The end in view was not so much to make man a nobler being, possessing in himself more of the sources of satisfaction, as it was to make him a more elaborately comfortable being, possessing and at the same time becoming dependent on a more and more complex apparatus of external aids. And by natural consequence, this optimism centred in Man. Great and marvellous were thy works, oh Man! Had we not one by one wrung nature's secrets from her keeping? Had we not explored

the heights of heaven and the ocean's abyss? Had we not built mighty engines, and leviathan ships, and mammoth cities with booming trade, and with mills and factories and universities and hospitals on an always more stupendous scale? We had constituted a wonderful empire of *things,* and called this empire of things civilization, and had enthroned man, modern man, as its lord and king. Swinburne gave voice to it, when he wrote his *Hymn to Man:*

> Glory to man in the highest, for man is the master of things.

And then came the scathing irony of the War; for ghastly and cruel as it is in every way, it is above all ironical and humiliating. Humanity in the twentieth century has shown itself to be but like children who have laid their hands on gunpowder and edged tools. Our treasure, the accumulation of generations, is blown into the air and sunk in the sea. Our science only adds to the horrors of war the submarine and the aeroplane, the high explosive and the deadly gas. Our political and diplomatic combinations only array against each other, not armies but nations, not nations but empires in arms. Disillusionment with a vengeance! Yes, but through disillusionment lies the way to truth. It is possible to form a really more optimistic judgment of ourselves to-day than half a

dozen years ago. We have found that we have "hearts for a cause," that we are "noble yet." We have got a truer scale of values. In the competitions of a rampant commercialism it was made to appear as if the "best" consisted in the qualities that make for successful self-seeking. Our soldiers have taught us again the supremacy of self-sacrifice. We have cast behind us the ideal of the comfortable, and have affirmed that for truth and honour and chivalry every price must be paid, that these are the things for which it is worth while even to die, and without which life is unlivable. There is in the mind and soul of the nation a more exalted vision of the "best."

But with this comes once more the need of a deeper basis for optimism, for faith in the "best." The old question meets us again, as live to-day as when the Book of Job or the tragedies of Aeschylus were written: Does this world, this system of things in which we live and struggle, recognize those values which we affirm to be supreme? Can we have faith that in the nature of things good must ultimately prevail over evil, that in striving for the "best" we have the deep eternal law of the universe behind us? The thought of man to-day is being driven back on that greatest of all issues.

On one side it is said with great force that the optimistic view is groundless, mere auto-sugges-

tion. The one power to overcome the world is the soul's inalienable power of despising and defying it. Faith and hope must go, that alone remains. All that remains for upright men is to go on doing the best with life, even though they know that the struggle is fore-doomed to failure. Shall I quote Henley's famous lines?

> Out of the night that covers me—
> Dark as the pit from pole to pole,
> I thank whatever gods there be
> For my unconquerable soul.
>
> In the fell clutch of circumstance
> I have not winced nor cried aloud:
> Under the bludgeonings of Chance
> My head is bloody but unbowed.
>
> Beyond this place of wrath and tears
> Looms but the horror of the shades;
> And yet the menace of the years
> Finds, and shall find me, unafraid.
>
> It matters not how strait the gate,
> How charged with punishment the scroll,
> I am the master of my fate,
> I am the captain of my soul.

But is not this a vain boast? Even to be captain of one's soul is not to be master of one's fate, unless to nail the flag to the mast and go down fighting, when one must go down in any event, is to be the master of fate.

Bertrand Russell faces the issue more squarely when in his *Religion of a Free Man* he says: "Henceforth we must learn to build our

soul's habitation on the one firm foundation of an unyielding despair." There is no reason, no conscience in the universe but our own; no law but the eternal redistribution of matter and motion. We may be brave, we may die in the last ditch; but there is one winning fight, one only, the fight of death and everlasting nothingness. Neither we, nor our race, nor any value or ideal we have cherished and striven for, can escape the universal doom.

Such is the tragic situation of a high moral consciousness as pitted against a non-moral universe. Tragic indeed, if real. But is it even possible? Certainly nothing could be more unaccountable. Here are we, beings in whom morality, often as we may be disloyal to it, is the deepest and strongest thing, bound by our very nature to fight the good fight; and we are at the same time part and product of a system of things which is soulless and conscienceless, cosmic dust in motion. How does such a universe come to have evolved such beings, to accuse it, to judge, despise and condemn it? Does the sea bring forth the eagle? Or the dry land the fish? Does darkness beget light, or would a soundless universe produce hearing? Does a cotton factory turn out symphonies and poems? To say that a non-moral universe has produced men is to say something still more incredible. Reason

will not have it. And the deepest instincts of the human soul will not have it. Men have passed through darker days than these and deeper waters and fierier furnaces, and yet have not lost their faith that in the end all things were upon their side. Nay, it has been in such straits that optimism has risen to its loftiest flights. Never have men been so sure of the everlasting law and kingdom of Righteousness as when falsehood and wrong have been mightiest upon the earth, "For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter." Yet ours is the winning fight. We are more than conquerors. Inexplicable as it may be, one of the things that cannot be permanently killed out in the human soul is its optimism, its faith in the "best" and hope for the "best."

The War has once more brought this issue to a sharp point in many minds. And the conclusion is forced on us with a new urgency that there is no basis for optimism except in that interpretation of life which we call religious faith—an interpretation which expressly disclaims being an explanation—the conviction that the Power which creates and conducts the world, and has staged the drama of human history thereon, means something by it, something really right and wise and good. If it be said that this

is to take refuge in mysticism, I would point out that rational thought has everywhere to take refuge in mysticism. Trust is the key to life. In the end all our great certainties are rooted and grounded in trust. We take each other on trust. It is the bond by which human society subsists; our loves and friendships live by the mystic sense of trust. We take nature and its laws ultimately on trust. The validity of our perception of all external phenomena is based on trust, on the assurance of what can never be logically demonstrated, that there is a correspondence between external reality and the percipient mind, that they are made the one for the other. And if such a trust is rational, though the matter is incapable of proof, it is no less rational to trust that there is in the universe that which corresponds to our moral intuitions and demands, that the Power that dwells and works at the heart of existence is the same that dwells and works in the yearning for truth, the fidelity to right, the reverence, the aspiration and the love which are the light and strength of our being.

No facile optimism will serve us long; only that which sounds the lowest depths will serve us to the end. The final Best, far beyond our furthest gaze, must have as its crowning glory, the transformed and transfigured worst.

And what is this but the optimism of the

Cross? Love suffering, love sacrificing; and by suffering and sacrifice redeeming: love in the Divine itself, suffering, sacrificing, redeeming; love in man, yes, and the love there is in nature, suffering, sacrificing, and by suffering and sacrifice redeeming—this is the clue to the unexplored windings of the labyrinth. It is the clue for us all to follow. Faith, Hope, Love, these three abide, and the greatest of these is Love. Love is the "best," and if we follow Love, we shall not be deserted by its fellows, Faith and Hope.

II.

THE CHRISTIAN ATTITUDE TOWARD WRONG

Ye have heard that it hath been said, an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.

But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil; but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.

And if a man will sue thee at law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also.

And whosoever shall compel thee to go with him a mile, go with him twain.

Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee, turn thou not away.—*Matthew v: 38-42.*

IN this paragraph of the Sermon on the Mount our Lord inculcates by four illustrative instances the duty of not resisting the "evil man." There is first the case of bodily assault: "Whosoever smiteth thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also." Next, the case of an action at law: "If any man would go to law with thee and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also." In order to avoid quarrel and litigation you are to be willing to surrender more than is demanded. Next, the case of forced service: "Whosoever shall compel thee to go one mile, go with him twain." If service is illegitimately demanded of you, instead of resisting the imposition you are voluntarily to render more. Lastly,

the case of pecuniary solicitation: "Give to him that asketh of thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn thou not away." Here it must be presumed that the asking is of that unreasonable sort which naturally provokes resentment.

In these words our Lord demands, or at any rate seems to demand, the entire renunciation of self-defense and self-vindication, of standing on one's rights in any way. The command is absolute. No reason is assigned for it. Nothing is said of any ulterior object, such as shaming or overcoming the adversary by heaping "coals of fire" upon his head. The duty is stated as simply self-evident. So far, however, is this from being the case that few words of Jesus have been more diversely interpreted. A few individuals here and there, and one or two bodies of Christians, like the Quakers and the Mennonites, have understood them and have endeavored to act upon them with absolute literalness, and have found in them the very pith of practical Christianity. On the other hand, competent scholars and candid thinkers have declared that such literalism is one of the worst perversions of the Gospel, holding up the teaching of Jesus to the ridicule of all sane, thinking men. In any case it must be admitted that these precepts, whether we regard them as appealing directly to the

moral sense or as resting on the principle of expediency, present a problem of no small difficulty. There is no normally constituted person whose conscience does not inform him that it is wrong to steal, wrong also to deny to a needy neighbor the help which it is in one's power to give. But it is more than questionable whether the normal conscience can recognize an absolute moral ideal in the requirement, that, if by high-handed violence one take from you a portion of your clothing, you are cheerfully to hand over to him a portion of the remainder; or, if the principle is applied to corporate social action, would acquiesce in the judgment that the police force is a thoroughly unchristian institution. Nor is it easy to see how, if the person and property of all were to be at the mercy of the most violent and unscrupulous, the social frame work would be strengthened and the world become a better habitation for human life. The fact is that such literalism as Tolstoi's, for example, represents not a Christian but a Rabbinical view of moral law. Jesus was not, and could not be, a legislator in the sense in which Moses was; and to suppose that the Sermon on the Mount is just a new and improved version of the Mosaic legislation is not only to misunderstand the method of Jesus but to miss what is most distinctive in His religious aims.

These injunctions obviously express a principle, or, rather, a method of applying a principle; and to discover the principle, and also the *rationale* of the method, we must study them in their original setting. There they stand in vehement opposition to the method of dealing with wrong by retaliation, to the vindictive spirit exhibited in the Mosaic maxim, "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." This was the spirit that prevailed in the ancient world, both Jewish and Gentile. The great Roman, Sulla, when from his death-bed he reviewed his career, summed up his good fortune in this, that no man had done more good to his friends or more harm to his enemies. The Jewish character also had a dark, vengeful strain in it, as some even of the Old Testament Scriptures, like the Book of Esther and certain of the Psalms, remain to show. Now this spirit Jesus utterly condemns. He can find no words too strong to express His abhorrence of it. He sees in its removal, or, let us rather say, in its reversal, a distinctive feature of the new spirit He had come to create in the world. And so true is this, and so much has it impressed mankind, that still when we speak of any one as acting in a "Christian spirit," we mean that he has displayed in some signal way the power of forgiving injuries.

But why is retaliation wrong? Jesus does

not say why. Intuitively He sees how undivine it is; and expects all who share His spirit to see it in the same light. Still, if we are to determine whether in all cases—or, if not, in what cases—the contrary method is applicable, we must consider the ethical principles which are involved.

We may estimate the morality of retaliation in the first place by its social effect. That effect is only to multiply the amount of evil in the world. The *vendetta,* personal, tribal, or national, is the means by which strife breeds ever fresh strife, and wrong fresh wrong; a kind of diabolical tennis-match in which the ball of injury and hate is hurled to and fro, and which, but for the limitations of human life and resource, would continue to the end of time, filling the earth with the ever increasing reverberations of enmity and violence.

Or again we may consider it as a manifestation of the moral life of the individual. There is nothing regarding which the moral judgment is apt to be further misled. Often men do not feel retaliation to be a crime; on the contrary, they often feel it to be emphatically right. To "get even" with those who do them an ill turn, so far from exciting a feeling of shame, makes them glow with honest pride and self-approval. It satisfies the imperious demand of what they feel to be their natural and proper self-respect.

The person who carelessly or maliciously injures me depreciates my personal worth; he treats me as a person of no consequence, as one who is weak and defenceless or pusillanimous and tame-spirited, and whose rights need not be scrupulously regarded. Consequently, if I do not retaliate, I seem to endorse this humiliating estimate of my personality; while what I naturally desire is to correct it as quickly and as drastically as possible. It is here that the crucial difficulty of Christ's law of forgiveness and non-retaliation lies. To submit to injury without effective protest is felt to be weakness, a letting down of the proper dignity of one's manhood. But the teaching and yet more the example of Jesus have shown the world how absolutely inverted this view of self-respecting manhood is. Weakness—to be inflamed with resentment, this is weakness. Humiliation—to be so influenced by men as to reproduce their evil spirit, this is humiliation. Strength—to refuse to do wrong because another has done wrong, this is strength. To realize that no man can really hurt you—hurt your soul—unless he can make you hate him, this is self-respect and self-vindication. In the ultimate truth of things, the power to forgive, the power to use all injuries only as an occasion for the assertion of what in us is of the most opposite character, goodwill in all its mani-

festations—this is moral sovereignty, the one absolute superiority to all wrongs and all wrong doers.

On the contrary, think what is the state of the merely revengeful man. It is a state from which love is entirely absent, a state of egoism blinded and misled, inflamed and militant. Revenge, as such, has no other end than self-gratification; and the gratification it seeks consists only in the infliction of pain upon another. The vindictive man finds his sweetest pleasure in another's grief; his proudest triumph in another's humiliation—surely the most devilish state in which it is possible for a human being to exist. It is not surprising, therefore, that the aversion of Jesus to the vengeful spirit is so strong that "the most emphatic utterance of the opposite quality is for Him precisely the right thing."

For next it is to be observed that Jesus enjoins not mere tranquil endurance of evil, but a voluntary readiness to turn the other cheek, go the second mile, give one's cloak also. The Christian's attitude towards wrong is not to be that of mere passive submission. That might be weakness, cowardice, or phlegmatic indifference. It might only prove that, like Hamlet, one is "pigeon-livered, and lacks gall to make oppression bitter." The Christian's attitude is to be

active, militant. He is to suffer wrong not because he must but because he wills; and he is to prove this by voluntarily surrendering more than he must. He is thus to carry the war into the enemy's country and overcome evil with good.

In these principles, then, Jesus first repudiates and condemns in the strongest manner the vengeful disposition, the spirit that finds its characteristic satisfaction in inflicting injury upon those who have inflicted injury upon us; and, secondly, He requires us to give practical proof that goodwill is unabated, that love is stronger than hate, patience stronger than anger, generosity than greed. And it is evident that these precepts indicate a particular method of applying the universal principle of love. And love must teach how to obey them; the precepts must be interpreted by the principle. It is easy by a mechanical interpretation to push them to practical absurdity. By giving liberally to every able-bodied beggar who asks an alms, would one be acting for the best interests of society, or of the able-bodied beggar himself? Would a merchant whose shop boy is caught purloining from the till be well-advised in promoting him to be cashier and giving him the keys of the safe? It is easy to ask such questions; yet we must greatly beware of minimizing the force and scope of the

method of dealing with evil which Christ here prescribes. Vengefulness may punish and even crush the wrongdoer; but it does not conquer him, does not eradicate the evil principle from his heart, does not make him ashamed of his sin, does not win him over to good. Love often does, and it is the only power that can. The amazing truth revealed in the Gospel is that love, working by this method of returning good for evil, is the power on which God Himself chiefly relies for our moral regeneration. When we smote Him on the one cheek by our sins, He turned to us the other also on the Cross. And this is the power He bids us rely on too. It may seem folly; but it is the foolishness of God, which is wiser than men. It may even fail—we have no guarantee that it will always succeed—but we must take the risk of insensibility and ingratitude, as God does.

The result of this part of our investigation may be summed up in the words of Bishop Gore: "So far as our personal feeling is concerned, we ought always to be ready to turn the other cheek, to give without desire or hope of receiving again. *Love knows no limits but those which love itself imposes. When love resists or refuses, it must be because compliance would be a violation of love.*"

We enter upon the second part of our enquiry

when we ask: Will love ever so resist or refuse? Is the turning of the other cheek not only one method—but the only method by which wise and enlightened love will act in seeking the highest good of men and society? Are we to take these precepts of Christ as prescribing an invariable course of action in every case? Or ought we to understand them as enjoining a spirit which will seek its end by this method but possibly by other methods also according to circumstances? This is an issue of vast importance; how vast is seldom realized. The question of war upon which the pacifist concentrates his arguments and his emotions, forms a very small part of it. If it is the law of Christ that wrong is in no case to be encountered except by the opportunity of doing redoubled wrong, every man who puts his money in a safe or puts a lock upon his door, or takes any precautions against assault upon his person and property is breaking the law of Christ, is resisting the "evil man." And much more than even this is involved. Literally construed, Our Lord's precepts have only an individual reference. They prescribe the duty of one person face to face with another person; they do not lay down any rule of conduct when the rights and interests of a third person are concerned. But those who find in them a prohibition of all forcible resistance to evil, as

for example defensive war, at this point desert the literal interpretation which so far they insist upon. They assume that a society, a nation, has a collective personality which can act, and is bound to act, in the same way as the individual. Consequently, they conclude that, according to the teaching of Christ, love requires of us the willingness to sacrifice not only our own interests, but the interests of others also—I am not only to turn my own cheek to the smiter but to stand by, forbidden to use more than verbal pleading and protest, when I see others smitten and robbed. Now without arguing for the present whether this is or is not what love requires, let me point out that this is a question which goes down to the foundation of all things, and challenges the moral principle of all government, human and divine. If this is the true interpretation, all enforcement of law in the family or the state is contrary to the ethics of Christ. Nay, even in the universe; for what is wrong in man cannot become right when it is ascribed to God, nor can that which is right in God be wrong for man. The whole conception of punitive or distributive justice as a moral ideal is swept away.

Let us endeavor to see what light the teaching and example of Christ Himself shed upon this question. And the first thing I find is that in Him the absolute meekness and patient endur-

ance of wrong, which He enjoins, and of which His prayer for those who nailed Him to the cross is the supreme example, was not incompatible with *anger,* with a fierce indignation against wrong. If one would know with what passion of invective human language may be charged, how words may be made to play like forked lightning around the heads of the wrongdoer and the hypocrite, let him read Christ's denunciation of the Scribes and Pharisees in the twenty-third chapter of Matthew. I know no other such expression of concentrated wrath. True, it was purely moral wrath. There was in it nothing egoistic, nothing vindictive. It was wrath against wrong as such: and it was wrath against *the persons* who did the wrong, and by continuing impenitent indentified themselves with it. We feel this to be right. There is an anger which is worthy only of the devil, but there is an anger which is pure, lofty, godlike; and when a man is destitute of such anger, has nothing in him that flames up at the sight of injustice or cruelty, nothing that flashes out indignation against the hypocrite, the traitor, the tyrant, there is something lacking to complete moral manhood. And if we ask how this is compatible with the voluntary suffering of wrong commanded in the Sermon on the Mount and exemplified on the Cross, the answer is that

in Jesus, and therefore in the true Christian, both spring from the same root—love. I once heard a celebrated preacher say: "I do not believe in a God who is all love, who is just one great kiss." But that is quite to misunderstand what the nature of love is. Love is not wholly saccharine; love does not always pet and fondle. Love has in it the sharpness of the sword, and the withering flame of fire. Love always suffers by another's sin: but it may suffer by causing the sinner to suffer. And whether love ought to meet wrong with tranquil submission and meek suffering, or with the antagonism of righteous wrath and rebuke, love's own inherent wisdom must ever teach. There may be those whose moral condition requires not the gentleness but the severity of love.

This leads up to the further question; when is this disposition of righteous anger and antagonism to wrong to be carried into action. For it is absurd to imagine that it can be right to possess the disposition and to express it in *words,* but wrong to express it in a course of action. Words and actions alike are manifestations of moral dispositions, and only as such are they of moral value. Now in the first place it is clear to me that when the interests of others are at stake, we are bound to act in vindication of the right. The teaching of Jesus requires of us in

every case the spirit of willing self-sacrifice, and, in most cases at least, the practice of it. But it never requires of us to sacrifice the rights and interests of other people—an important distinction frequently lost sight of. There is, for example, a wide difference between what a man may or ought to do on his own account and what he may or ought to do as trustee for another. I may do what I will with my own. I may sell my goods at less than market value; I may not insist upon my debtors paying me the last farthing; I may pay one man for an hour's work as much as I pay another for bearing the burden and heat of the day; but, if I am acting as trustee of another's property, these kind and charitable actions become nothing else than a breach of trust. And this principle that we have no right to sacrifice others reaches far. Let us take Tolstoi's famous example: If you see a brutal man killing a child or outraging a woman, you may plead with him, you may interpose your own body between the assailant and his victim; but one thing you must not do—oppose him to the length of bodily violence or placing his life in danger; or, as Tolstoi puts it, "deliberately abandon the law you have received from God." It may be said confidently that such a view of duty is repugnant to the normal moral sense, and, with fewest exceptions, men would indig-

nantly deny that such a law can be the law of God. If you have the power, even at the risk of injury to yourself, to save the victims of violence, you are to that extent a trustee of righteousness. You can renounce only what is your own. Your pride, your property, your rights, your wounded self-love, your life—these you may resign. To such self-sacrifice Christ calls you. But if you are entrusted with the guardianship of the weak against the strong, of the wronged against the wrong-doer, of the human sheep against the human wolf, then the principle of self-sacrifice will apply in quite another way than that of non-resistance.

Clearly, also, this principle carries with it the action of public punitive justice. The State is trustee for the people and is bound to prevent lawless aggression upon its subjects, and, in order to ensure its prevention, to punish it when it occurs. It may be noted that the *lex talionis,* "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth," was originally not a code of private vengeance but a maxim of public law. It belongs to the most primitive stratum of Semitic jurisprudence, going back not only to the earliest Hebrew but to Babylonian legislation. In the Code of Hammurabi it is written: "If a man has made the tooth of a man that is his equal to fall out, one shall make his tooth to fall out; and if a man

has caused a gentleman's eye to be lost, his eye shall one cause to be lost." Now the morality of such a law will depend upon the idea that animates it. If the purpose is to compensate the man who has suffered the loss of a tooth by the pleasure of seeing his enemy under the dentist's hands, this is precisely what Christ condemns, whether in private or public action. But if the purpose was, as may charitably be hoped, to secure that by losing his own tooth the wrong-doer might be brought to a due sense of the injury he had inflicted, and that he and other similarly disposed persons might be deterred from making a habit of damaging the teeth of peaceable citizens, we can see a rough and ready justice in it.

The *rationale* of public justice is that one must undo the effects of the wrong he has done. One who has stolen must be made to restore what he has theftuously taken. More than that, however. By his act he has injured the whole community. He has diminished the general sense of security, and has weakened the moral influence of the law, so that were he only compelled to make restitution when detected, his example would still furnish to other dishonest people an inducement to steal on the chance of escaping detection. It is just and right, therefore, that he be so dealt with that there will be

afterwards as little temptation to steal as before he stole. A perfectly just punishment would be such—no more and no less—as to place the interests of society in the same position in which they were before the crime was committed. What do the principles of Jesus say to this conception of punishment? First and obviously, that punishment must not be inflicted in a spirit of revenge. Vindictiveness, a feeling of gratification at the suffering inflicted on a criminal, is as unchristian in the community as in the individual. All the barbarous and ferocious punishments of former times, the unmentionable horrors, which served no other end than to glut the appetite for savage cruelty, have, under the influence of Christianity, fallen into blessed desuetude; and the conviction steadily grows that even for the protection of society the most effective kind of punishment is that which aims at the reformation of the offender (the only real guarantee that he himself will not repeat the crime, and the best deterrent to others which his example can afford).

But does not the teaching of Jesus altogether sweep aside such a conception of justice, as the Christian anarchist contends? I am unable to find in word or deed of Jesus any hint of such a purpose. He rebukes the Pharisees for neglecting the right administration of justice

(τήν Κρίσιν Matt. 23: 23); and although naturally he has little to say regarding human jurisprudence, yet if He had regarded its basal principle as wrong, He could have found opportunity enough of saying so. But if He had little to say regarding human government, He had very much to say regarding the Divine. All goes back to this: How does God, Who is love, govern in His kingdom? This, which is the crucial point in the whole enquiry, is singularly lost sight of by many. Christ bids us be perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect. He constantly illustrates the moral nature of God and the principles of Divine action by human analogies. It is fundamental to the teaching of Jesus that man's moral nature is the image of God's. Human love and Divine love, human righteousness and Divine righteousness, are the same in character and content. Otherwise no real fellowship in spirit and in truth could be possible between God and man. How then does God govern in His kingdom? Jesus Christ has taught us the amazing truth that God's chosen and supreme method of meeting evil is the method of sin-bearing, self-sacrificing love, the method of the Cross. But is this His sole method? Has He no other which He uses as auxiliary to this, or which, in the temporary or ultimate failure of this, He is constrained to

employ? There is no room for doubt as to the answer Jesus gave to that question. God is the Father of spirits and seeks always to win us and rule us by truth and grace; but nowhere else than in the teaching of Jesus is that fact more clearly set side by side with this, that God is also the Almighty Ruler and Judge of the universe, the Trustee of eternal righteousness, and that He meets evil with physical antagonisms, corrections, and compulsions, administered and directed for moral ends. Whom He loveth He chasteneth. Those who are obstinately evil He punishes; punishes here and will punish hereafter. *By His very love God is bound to antagonize wrong.* His love requires that right shall be rewarded and wrong punished. This, indeed, is inherent in the constitution of a universe created and administered by love. And if God in His government act thus, it follows that earthly governments, in their lower sphere, and that each of us, in so far as he is a trustee of the moral order, must do likewise.

We come lastly to the question of war. And it is very plain that in an ideal world, a really Christian world, just as little as there could be policeman or magistrate, could there be international warfare; and with the faith Christianity inspires, it is not extravagant to look forward to a time when they shall all alike have

become obsolete. As we look back with some astonishment to a time when it was thought that questions of honor, as between man and man, could be settled only by mortal combat, so a time will come when men shall look back with uncomprehending wonder to the dark ages in which nations put to the arbitrament of bayonets and artillery questions which reason and conscience should judge and decide. Even as a result of the present Armageddon we may hope that everywhere men's eyes will be opened to the sheer stupidity as well as the criminality of war; that the whole civilized world will be united against war, and that in the future one nation will no more be able to wage aggressive war against another nation without the certainty of punishment, than a man in this country can at present attempt to force a duel upon his neighbor without being locked up for breach of the peace. But we have to deal with the world as it is. And that the law of love, the teaching of Jesus, intends that the nations of the world, their political freedom, the honor of their women, the life and property of their subjects, shall be at the mercy of whichsoever of them is most selfish, conscienceless, and morally undeveloped, or that all armed resistance to aggression and tyranny and all armed defence of a nation's rights and liberties is wrong, I can see no ground at all for believing.

In the world we of this generation are living in, there is only one really militaristic nation, only one which proudly avows itself to be a "war-state" and believes that war is a nation's business, by which it grows strong and wealthy and morally great, and which therefore organizes itself for war. And assuredly it is not the will of God that a nation with such ideals should dominate the world and impose its "kultur" upon it. Assuredly it is the will of God that, when the conflict is forced upon us we should do everything and suffer everything to prevent this. The government of a country, if it sacrificed the rights and liberties of its subjects to such a power, would do as great a wrong as if it sacrificed them to the criminal or the madman.

There is one kind of war, and one only, which the law of love will sanction, and not only sanction but enjoin—war which is a weapon of righteousness not of hate; war to prevent or to redress foul international wrong; war for the sake of peace based on righteousness, its only foundation, not for extension of territory; for the punishment of evil doers, not for the subjugation of rivals; for the establishment of freedom, for the protection of the weak and innocent, not for oppression and the sating of ruthless ambition. Such is the war we are now wag-

ing. Let us wage it in a spirit of firm dependence upon God, who has laid this terrible task upon us; and without malice toward the foe. In war, as in all else, the one thing the teaching of Christ forbids and the spirit of Christ excludes is hate, a vindictive disposition which exults and gloats over the suffering and disaster of others. It is the melancholy necessity of the case that we can establish the right only by inflicting defeat and immediate disaster upon our adversary. But though the tragic duty has to be performed, just as we have to fight against the hallucinated fury of a maniac, we must have the courage, and maintain it, not to return hate for hate. And notwithstanding all that is happening in this year of the Christian era, let not the hope fail us that God will give increasingly to mankind that divine spirit which came in Jesus Christ to restore the world, and the new day dawn when strife and sin shall

Pass with the stars, and leave us with the sun.

III.

THE POWER OF SYMPATHY

I sat where they sat.—*Ezekiel iii: 15.*

LAST Sunday evening I spoke of the sovereign law of Love that runs through all life, and governs all life. The whole, or nearly the whole problem of making a success of human life, either for the individual, or for society, lies in bringing to bear this unifying power of Love, upon all its complex relations. To-night, I want to advance a step. Love is the law and the power by which all the problems of humanity must be solved. Sympathy is the necessary atmosphere.

When we look at human life we are struck by the diversities which separate men:—diversities of fortune, race, religion and occupation, and, deeper still, of mind, taste and character. There are the poor and the rich; the busy toiler and the people of leisure; the man of affairs and those who live in the world of thought; the religious and the irreligious; the virtuous and the criminal. And these diversities become real lines of division. They create what we call the separate classes which exist in every com-

munity. The poor live with the poor; the rich suround themselves with the rich; the religious with the religious; the criminal with the criminal. We associate with those who think our thoughts, feel our feelings, share our tastes, confirm our opinions, and have the same outlook on life and its affairs. And all this, it might seem, makes sympathy impossible. What can the man immersed in business from morning till night know of the aspirations of the artist? How can the affluent appreciate the bitter struggle of the poor? Can we indeed put ourselves in any other human being's place? In a large measure we can. Besides these separate places of circumstance and education, there are the far broader places of universal human nature and experience. We are all of one clay. In our own nature we have the key to every man's nature if we use it. Accidental differences drop out when we come to the big things of life. King and beggar, ploughman and millionaire share these fundamental elements. Everyone who has sorrowed can sympathize with another's sorrow. Everyone who has rejoiced, can feel with another's joy. Everyone who has struggled against his own temptation, can sympathize with another against his. Everyone who has sinned, can sympathize with his fallen brother or sister. Everyone who has

repented, with another's penitence. There are these great places of joy and sorrow, of hope and struggle, of sin and repentance, of strain or calm, in which we can sit where others sit, and grasp their hands in the darkness, or smile with them in the light. And sympathy is the eyes of love. It is by its vision alone that we can fulfill towards each other Christ's law of love, "Thou shalt love they neighbour as thyself."

I. In the first place, it is only by sympathy that we can form a true judgment of one another. Look at this experience of the Prophet Ezekiel. We are told that Ezekiel was fitted to be God's messenger to these backsliding, idolatrous Jews of the Captivity. First, he receives his message; then he is exempted from delivering it. He is equipped, first, with a fearless spirit. They are hard men, brazen-faced sinners to whom he is sent. And he goes forth armed with burning indignation to meet their anger and scorn, his face strong against their faces, his forehead against their foreheads. Assuredly they would hear the truth from the Prophet's lips. He will pour it out upon them like burning lava. But when he arrives and meets these people face to face, somehow he cannot carry out his programme. Instead of instantly launching out upon them the thunderbolts of condemnation, he went down to them gently, and dwelt with

them by the River Chebar. He sat where they sat, listened to their talk, saw the manner of their life; and as more and more he appreciated their difficulties and temptations, their miseries and distress—as more and more the story of their lives, the secrets of their hearts became an open book to him, his temper became strangely changed. He sat among them in silence, filled with conflicting emotions. His fiery invectives of fierce denunciation were forgotten. For seven days he could not open his mouth. And, when at length utterance came back, he spoke out, not as a Sultan's ambassador denouncing a horde of rebels, but as one who had crept into the very hearts of those he had wished to help. Before Ezekiel sat down where they sat, he summed them up in one word as apostates—idolators. But now, he saw them rather as the lost sheep of the House of Israel to be wooed back to the fold. You can never judge righteous judgment except in the atmosphere of sympathy. You are never competent to judge any man until you try to put yourself in his place, and have sat where he sits. And the longer I live, the more clearly do I see that the harsh, contemptuous verdicts we so often pass upon our fellow creatures, are, for the most part, due to deficient knowledge. The man we have thought mean, had obligations—others depending on him we

had not heard of. The man we thought surly, had some physical malady setting his nerves on edge, or has gone through seas of struggle which would have overwhelmed a man less masterful. The man we thought weak, has struggled harder perhaps than ever we have done; and much of what we have thought positive evil in him, was, in reality, baffled, defeated goodness. And even the criminal! Could we sit where he has sat, we would see how slender often times have been his chances of becoming anything else, of how by one false step, perhaps, he has become entangled in a net of evil circumstances, from which he has never had the force of will to wrench himself free. We may well question whether we ourselves, if in his place, would have come off victorious. No! We are not competent to judge anyone until we have sat where he sits. And the truth is, that we can never wholly do that. There was only One Who could —Jesus Christ. He knew what was in man, all the good and all the evil, the strength and the weakness, knew the history of every man's struggle and defeat. And that is what makes the judgments of Jesus Christ often so strange and unexpected. Even when men were hammering the spikes through His hands and feet, He put Himself in their place, and said, "Father, forgive them for they know not what

they do." And, judging with perfect knowledge and sympathy he declared that the publicans and harlots would pass into the Kingdom of Heaven before those who accounted themselves the salt of the earth, whose hearts were filled with the pride of self-righteousness, the venom of censorious judgment. Yes! That was one of the greatest evils in the eyes of Jesus Christ—unsympathetic, censorious, ruthless judgment of others. It is one of the greatest evils. It not only reveals an evil heart, it does a great deal to embitter the relations of men and classes to one another, and to exasperate their difficulties. There is scarcely anything, I think, that would do more to sweeten and clarify the atmosphere in which human life, with all its struggle of interests, and clash of opinion, and antagonism of will, must be carried on, than that we should honestly believe, what is true, that our fellowmen, even our opponents, are, for the most part, as well-intentioned as ourselves.

II. But further, sympathy is the great solvent of such antagonisms. We are so sure of our own point of view, and so blind to our brother's, so eager to insist upon our own, and so unwilling to take pains to understand his, that we are in danger of forgetting that every question that is a subject of debate must have two

sides; in danger of forgetting that those who take a different view of it, have eyes as well as we, presumably are honest and reasonable as well as we, and have some truth on their side as well as we on ours. So the evil works in private life. When there is estrangement between husband and wife, or between parent and child, or separation of friends, it is generally because each sees his own rights and wrongs and is determined to insist upon them, and not to see the rights and wrongs of the other. And then, "Behold how great a matter a little fire kindleth!" In the atmosphere of sympathy that fire could never be kindled, and in that atmosphere it would quickly die. How surely and swiftly would soreness and suspicion be swept away were we just say to each other frankly and tenderly: "There is something wrong between us, and we do not understand each other. I need to sit where you sit; you need to sit where I sit. Tell me the whole of your case as you see it and I shall tell exactly how it appeals to me, and laying our two heads and hearts together, we shall no doubt kill any root of bitterness." Yes! If we wouldst cross over into each other's place in some such manner as that, we should make a sweeter and better world of it. For we really have a little human love for each other, if it were only allowed fair play.

But it is in regard to the different classes in a community that the need of an atmosphere of sympathy is most acute. They are not natural enemies. They have all the greatest common interests, thoughts and feelings in common. They ought to be united in co-operation, trust, and good will. And what is it, then, that so often creates conditions the opposite of this? Gross inhuman selfishness? Seldom. Not that—but the inability, or the unwillingness to look at the other side. The toiler knows where he sits, knows the weary confinement of his daily task, the weary monotony of everlastingly doing the same thing without variety or excitement. He thinks of his small share of the profits—the difference between the employer's house and that which shelters his wife and children. That is where he sits. The capitalist or employer sits in his own seat. He thinks, perhaps, of the long years of early struggle, hardship, self-denial which have brought him to his present position. He thinks of all the responsibilities and worries which weigh upon him day by day, keeping him awake at night—of the uncertainties and risks which are always a part of his business—the lean years in which he makes no profit at all—the endless wear of brain and nerve. That is where he sits. Each of them sees his own side of the case, and broods over

it, and perhaps neither of them tries to look honestly and sympathetically at the other. And, therefore, instead of mutual consideration and good will, there is mutual distrust, watchful suspicion, and a slumbering enmity which is always ready to break out. Brethren, I am not propounding any easy way of solving the industrial problem. I am not saying that it can be solved off hand merely by sympathy and mutual goodwill. But I do say, and I have the whole nature of things and the whole of human experience with me when I say that in no other atmosphere can it ever be solved—solved in anyway that is not merely ruin and destruction. Oh, you can solve it in *that* way if you will. You may fight until nothing is left to fight for. You may even fight until none are left to carry on the strife. But if we are to make a better world, and not a worse, to build up and not to destroy, all classes and conditions must unite in this effort, and pull together, and this they can do, only as they seek honestly and patiently to understand their right relation one to the other and each to the whole. That is sympathy. Only in that atmosphere can all differences be reconciled in a higher and grander unity.

III. I should like to go further with my theme, and impress upon you that sympathy is a condition of all real service to men. You really

help anyone only in the measure that you can put yourself in his place, and sit where he sits. The teacher must sit where his pupil sits, the comforter where the mourner, the succourer where the tempted, the saint where the sinner. But let me point rather to the supreme example, to Whom our thoughts are specially drawn at this Christmas season. When God would give His greatest help to men He had to become man to do it. The Infinite had to come down to our nature and our experience and sit where we sat. The word that was God became flesh, and dwelt among us. There was no other way, even for God, no other way. The Infinite Love had to become a human experience. The pity of a God had to become the sympathy of a man, that it might touch us and draw us to Himself. Think how the Lord of Glory came to us and sat where we sit; how He came as a babe, needing only a breastful of milk, and a mangerful of hay; how, amidst the joys, and sorrows, and struggles of the humble home, and in the daily toil of the workshop, and in the worship of the Synagogue, He began to learn the meaning of life men live here on earth; how He learned the art of virtue, by being tempted in all points as we are; how, when He went forth into the world, He met all the ills that flesh is heir to—all poverty and grief, sickness and suffering,

He made them His own, as the burden of His own soul, until on the Cross He descended into the most abysmal depths, and learned to the uttermost what suffering is, to the uttermost of what sin is, to the uttermost of what sorrow and desolation of soul is, what death can be. It behooved Him to be made in all points like unto His brethren. And to what end? That through Him we might obtain mercy, and find grace to help; that He may be enough for our every need; that His life may touch and flow into ours at every point, with quickening, with strength, and with comfort. Let us once more bow before this Divine Man, Christ Jesus our Lord. Let us trust Him truly, and bring all our burdens, and temptations, and sins to Him Who understands them all, because He has borne them all, and is able to deal with them all because he has conquered them all. But not for this alone has He sat where we sit, but that we also should do as He has done. What is the lure of Christmas but a fresh call to feel something of that Christian brotherhood which links us to our fellowmen, draws sympathy and affection out anew to those whose faces are always dear, and out anew on every side; and, if there are enmities in our lives, to have hearts eager for reconciliation; and, if there are needy ones within reach of our help, to have hearts eager to give

that help, hearts ready to rejoice with the joyful; and, if it be so, to weep with them that weep. Brethren, let this mind be in you and me which was also in Christ Jesus and we shall help, each in his own place, to make for ourselves better souls, and a better world. Not *my* Christ only—He is *ours*—Humanity's close bond—the key to its vast, unopened prisons.

IV.

THE STORY OF A TOUCH

And Jesus said "Who touched me?" When all denied, Peter and they that were with him said, "Master, the multitude throng and press you and sayest thou, "Who touched me? And Jesus said, "Somebody hath touched me, for I perceive that virtue is gone out of me."—*Luke viii 45-46.*

THE unique feature in the narrative of this miracle is that it is the story of a touch, and a picture of the difference between touching Christ and thronging Him. Let us look at it. Our Lord is walking slowly along the streets of Capernaum in the midst of a crowd of people pressing him on every side, when suddenly he stands still and asks, "Who touched me?" A strange question it seemed under the circumstances; and Peter, always ready to speak to the occasion, naturally enough expressed surprise at hearing it. But the Master was not to be thus answered. Someone had touched Him in quite another way than the casual crowd. In the midst of that excited and gesticulating mob there was a silent figure of a fragile woman whose pallid lips and wasted features were set in a desperate resolve, her hollow eyes gleaming with sup-

pressed excitement as she watched for her opportunity, and skilfully threading her way drew, minute by minute, near to the Master, until, creeping up behind Him, she is able to dart out a stealthy hand and touch, only touch, the fringe of His mantle. He had felt in His very soul the nervous movement, and somehow He was conscious of it as a mute appeal to his sympathy and succour. He knew neither who the supplicant was nor what was the trouble, but thrilled to that touch—the touch of trembling faith. It unlocked the flood-gates of His pity and His power, and before even asking what the need was, He supplied it.

Here, then, is the first difference between the many who thronged Christ and the one who touches Him. It is the difference between the contact of mere vicinity and the touch of deliberate purpose and resolve. To the multitude Jesus was the fashion and excitement of the hour. To them His doings in the neighborhood afforded a welcome distraction from the monotony of everyday affairs. To the woman it was, and she knew it was, the crisis of her fate—the moment when either the cloud which had settled upon her life should be lifted, or her fate henceforth lead through the Valley of the Shadow. The same difference always exists. It exists among ourselves. In some fashion we

all touch Christ, or at least His garment. Christ's garment sweeps through our world. Every day—week day and Sabbath day—we are thrust against it. Born and brought up in Christian homes, Christ's garment touched you then. You are brought into contact with it on your marriage day. At every funeral you have attended, Christ has been present too, saying, "I am the Resurrection and the Life." You cannot travel through a week without meeting Christ by the way. Every time the Sabbath comes round and the bells peal out, calling you to His house, whether you listen to the summons or not, you are brought into some manner of contact with Him. You cannot read the best literature, whether poetry or prose, you cannot listen to the noblest music, nor look through a picture gallery, but the hem of Christ's garment touches you. Christ's garment is everywhere, in all the combines of life, the social and religious institutions, the everyday thought and language of a Christian community, Christ's garment touches you. You are thrust upon it by the movement of the crowd that is thronging about the Son of Man. But how often is this contact, now as of old, no more than mechanical, unpurposed, an accident of the time and place! You know how possible it is to sit through a religious service, and never once touch Christ— to listen

to a sermon approving or disapproving it as an oratorical performance, or even as evangelical or unevangelical in its tone and teaching, and never once touch Christ. But it is one thing to have Christ's garment touching you, and altogether another thing for you to touch it. Are we to-day to be like those who thronged about Him, doing nothing, expecting nothing, who empty came and empty went? Or have we come here that we may obtain *something,* to have some of His divine virtue imparted to us? Then will He be compelled to say this morning again, "Somebody hath touched Me."

But observe further, the difference between the thronging of mere interest and the touch of desperate need. Many in that crowd were there because drawn by some real interest. They were patriotically interested in this wonderful Galilean Prophet who had arisen in their midst, and made their town famous. Or they were sympathetically interested in the distress of their townsmen, Jairus, and his household. Or they were intellectually interested regarding the method and the measure of Christ's miraculous powers: "Would the girl be still alive when He reached the house? If not, would He Who healed the sick, be able also to restore the dead, or have to own Himself baffled?" And it is so to-day. There is great interest in Christ and

Christianity. Science has awakened to the dis- [illegible] the facts of religious experience, [illegible] are as worthy a subject of study [illegible] the classification of beetles, or [illegible] of comets. It is impossible to [illegible] of the problems which are of the pr[illegible] significance to the individual and to th[illegible] impossible to give one's mind seriously to the political, and social and international questions of our day which go down to the moral basis of human life, without being at least interested in the light Christ shed upon them. It is impossible to have any philanthropic regard for the moral welfare of society, and interest in the influences which practically mould the character of men and nations, without recognizing Christianity as the chiefest of these. And, Brethren, it is a great matter that men should have even an interest in Christianity. God forbid that it should be otherwise. Only this is not—it is not—to touch Christ. To be interested in, even to admire, even to accept Christianity as a view of the universe, as a principle of morals, as an ameliorative force in the world, this is not to touch Christ. But think how this woman touched Him. Hers was the touch of personal, and even desperate need. How pathetic is the tale which the Gospel in its few words suggests! What a sky of misery over this

woman's life, broken again and again by gleams of hope, only to be extinguished again in dark disappointment! There is not an orthodox remedy, nor a quack's nostrum she had not tried, not a pretender to the healing art of whom she had not become a prey. The sorrows of poverty were but added to the miseries of chronic disease. She was not actually dead like the Ruler's little daughter, but she often wished she was, as she still dragged out her sad weary life, dying by inches, help after help failing, hope after hope kindled only to expire. No mere interest, no mild attraction for Christ here, but the grasping at a last resource.

Is this, then, you may ask, a description of the very process by which everyone must come to touch Christianity? Must we spend all our living on other physicians before we come to the only Physician, or try every other Saviour before we touch the only Saviour? Thank God, rather, that with many of us Christ was the first as He shall be the last. But how often is Christ the last resource! The way to the Father's home, the Father's welcome, is open all the time. But to arise and go to the Father!—it needs the whip of starvation to drive the self-willed prodigal to that. And how often, too, is Christ the last resource of a good man, of a man struggling with his sins, trying to maintain his self-respect

and mend his character! How many of Christ's most notable servants have been driven by failure upon failure, and at last total self-despair, to His feet! If we look at humanity as a whole, do we not find that Christ stands as the last resource? The world has always been dissatisfied with itself, always concerned about its state, and has tried every authentic remedy, and many a quack's prescription as well:—Law to suppress vice and reform external habits and manners; science seems to improve the external surroundings and equipment of life; philosophy to lift the mind above the deception of sensuous things and teach the art of living by Right Reason; æsthetics to make men better through the culture of the senses—by poetry, pictures and music; the Church to elevate and purify the emotions with mystic ritual and fervent eloquence. And when all fail, as they do fail, there is Christ waiting. So He is waiting to-day. This modern world has made trial of many physicians. Science, philanthropy, education, inventions, have been doing their utmost for man's happiness, health and comfort, for all that we call progress and civilization. And the verdict human history itself is writing is, "Nothing the better, but rather the worse."

And all the time Christ is patiently, pathetically waiting, for the world to come to Him,

to take His yoke, to learn of Him the Divine secret of life, and get from Him the Divine spirit of life—the transforming power of Love, the one key to all that is otherwise insoluble, the path to all that is otherwise impossible, and the one hope that is still shining above the darkness of human chaos. Christ is waiting for the world to come to Him. Will it come? And all that is true of you and me. There is only one way really to touch Christ, not necessarily as the last resource in time, but as the only resource in reality. To be done with everything and everyone else, and to stand like a beggar with empty, outstretched hands, and receive the salvation of Christ as the alms of Love, without money and without price. To the merely interested, Christ has but little charm; but to the contrite in heart, to the man who knows himself, His is the Name that is above every name.

So it was with this woman. She had lost her money, which is a very important thing. She had lost what was more important to her —health. She had lost what was more important than either—she had lost hope. And, just when there seemed to be nothing to look for but the last stroke of human calamity, some wind wafted His name her way, some rumor of His power had reached her, and as she brooded over

what she heard, during many a silent hour, a great hope stirred once more within her. She felt sure, If only I might come near Him for a moment so as to touch the hem of His garment, I shall be made whole. Do you ask how such a conviction could be accounted for? I say you cannot account for it. You cannot explain faith. If you could explain it, it would not be faith. Faith has a life of its own, a certainty of its own on other grounds than those of logical understanding. "My sheep hear My voice and they follow Me." And this woman had heard the inward voice in her soul. She had tried many a physician and experimented with many a remedy. Now she was not experimenting any more—she was sure. "If I may but touch Him I shall be whole." And now on the moment, she resolved to make the venture. In an instant she found herself. Though frail as a leaf, fighting her way through the surging crowd, elbowing aside strong men until almost before she knew it, she had, yes, with her thin, bloodless fingers, she had touched the hem of His garment. And at that touch, the misery of twelve years was at and end. A thrill of invigorating delight thrilled through the feeble frame. Life was keen again. The very sunshine was brighter to the eye, and all the world strangely new and beautiful. The simple touch saved her wholly, saved her at once.

But again, consider the difference between thronging and touching. It is the difference between believing and acting. In the crowd doubtless there were many who believed about Christ's healing power exactly as this woman did, and doubtless also there were some who needed. But they believed only. She believed and acted. Lay hold of that point, I beg. A great deal has been said about this woman's faith. Some speak of the audacity of her faith. Others speak of the superstition that mingled with it. No doubt there was a great deal of that. She seemed to think of Christ as a kind of living electric battery. Yes, her ideas were crude and superstitious enough, but all that is beside the point. Whether intelligent or superstitious, the whole matter is, her faith *did* something, and did everything that was needed. It touched Christ. Brethren, it is of little consequence what men believe about Christ if it is only believing *about* Him. Here we are a congregation of orthodox, evangelical people, holding very correct, intelligent views about Christ and the Christian faith. All that is very good; but it is not the main thing. It is not the first thing nor the deepest thing. Behind all that is this—whether you want to be made a different man or a different woman— different morally and spiritually, as this woman wanted

to be physically. That is the great question. And I can imagine Christ looking over a congregation like this, where we are scriptural and evangelical, and where the Gospel is preached Sunday by Sunday, and where there is nothing superstitious nor ignorant, and seeing in this congregation, this one here, that one there, who, with all his orthodox beliefs about Christ, has no thought or intention of becoming a different man because of Christ. And I can imagine Christ looking at some other congregation, in some land whose inhabitants are grossly superstitious, and seeing some poor soul who is filled with silly ideas about beads and holy water and a hundred other things, but behind all that a deep willingness and desire to be made different by Jesus Christ. And I can imagine the Lord passing over some of us who, with all our evangelical beliefs, are merely thronging Him, and have no real intention of being changed by Him, and giving His blessing to that ignorant and superstitious soul, as he gave it to this poor woman, because it touches Him with its deep inward desire to be changed by Him. Brethren. Christ is not a creed or a theological formula. Christ is not a history. It is not what we believe about Christ that makes us finally right or wrong, but what we do with Him. Christ is the Living One: Speak to Him for He

hears; Touch Him with your soul; Confess to Him all your sins, your troubles, and your needs; Use Him day by day, that through Him you may obtain forgiveness of your sins, become better men and women, holier toward God, more loving toward men. Yes, Brethren, all that we call religion is just touching Christ's garment, which He, now throned above, still lets down within our reach, that we may touch it, and through it touch Himself.

The Church is Christ's glorious garment, with its holy fellowship, its solemn worship, its ministry of word and sacrament, if we come to it with earnest believing hearts. And when you come to the Communion Service next Sunday, I do not care so much to know what your theology is, or what your view of the sacrament. The question is: Will you come in order that your soul may touch Christ there, that you may be changed yet a little more into His likeness? Aye, and all the changeful experiences of life, its joys, its trials, may be to us Christ's garment, through which we touch Himself and receive of His fulness,

> The healing of His seamless dress,
> Is by our beds of pain,
> We touch Him in life's throng and press,
> And we are whole again.

The Divine Healer is present now. And as

this poor woman represents us in our need, let her represent us also in our resolve, and in our act, lest the hem of His garment be swept away beyond the reach of our hesitating hand.

V.

STRENGTH FOR THE DAY

As thy days, so shall thy strength be.—Deuteronomy xxiii: 25.

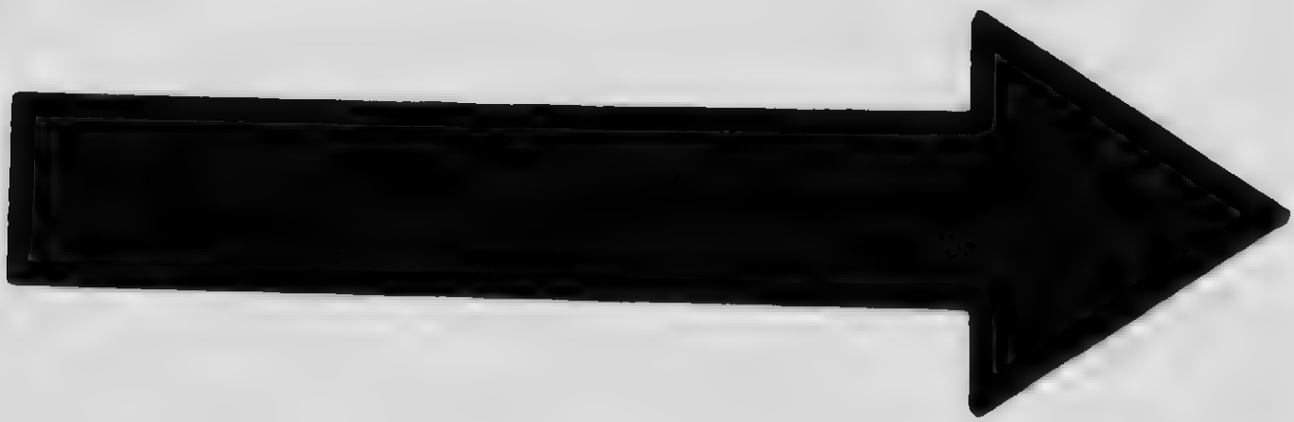
THIS is one of the great verses of the Bible. It is like the well of some ancient times, like Jacob's well at Sychar, for instance, at which Jesus sat, and which remains there unto this day. For four thousand years it has been giving forth its waters to countless thirsty lips, Jew and Canaanite, Saracens and Crusaders, wandering Bedouins of the desert, pilgrims of every nation under heaven, all have been there, and from its inexhaustible depths the well has ministered refreshment to them all. Little children, labourers, weary travellers have drunk of its waters, and will drink of them in time to come as in days of old. And this text is one of God's wells, no less bountiful and perennial in their flow. God's word is full of such wells. It is beyond all other books the Book of Encouragement, full of succour and of comfort, of all that says to suffering, sorrowing, struggling men, "Be of good cheer; be not afraid." And the Bible is this, because it looks so straight at sternest realities, the

literature of the world often tries to be exhilarating by ignoring this, or despising reality. It makes a great play with the surface happiness of the world. But the Bible looks the whole difficulty and tragedy of life full in the face. It comes to us in our weariness, our sins, our fears, our despondencies, with its living words of strength and consolation from the living God our Father, making us feel that there is in the universe a heart that beats with our heart, and that underneath are the Arms of Everlasting Strength. And all that is exemplified in my text, "As thy days, so shall thy strength be." It is spoken to us as travellers, as those who are making a journey about which the only certainty is, that it is not an easy journey but difficult, and that there is a great deal to overcome by us, much hindrance to every high kind of resolve and noble purpose,.

1. Let us think, first, how peculiarly indispensable is the thing here promised. And, of course, when we say "indispensable," the question at once arises, Indispensable for what, to whom? People who make journeys may be divided into two classes: Tourists and real travellers; those who journey for pleasure, those who journey on serious business. And according to the class to which they belong are their ideas of what is indispensable. When I cross the

Atlantic, I am often amused and instructed by the conversation of some of the passengers. They talk of little else than the food, the service, the baths, and the steward. They compare the ship they are in, with others they have travelled by. They prefer the Cunard to the White Star, or *vice versa;* and they rather think they will go by a different line next time. They take a pride in showing themselves expert in these matters. Naturally. They are only tourists. They are tender, finical people who are not out to rough it. But, for the traveller who has an urgent mission to accomplish, or who has a precious cargo in the hold, these are matters of little concern. Seaworthiness is everything to him. It is enough if the good ship plough her way through flood and tempest, and, though bearing on hull and canvas many a mark of conflict with the deep, bring crew and cargo safe at last to the desired haven. And so, Brethren, it makes all the difference as to what we reckon indispensable, whether we are making the journey of life only as tourists, or as travellers on serious business, who have a goal to reach, long distances to traverse, and unknown difficulties and dangers to overcome before it can be gained.

There are many good things which, at a pinch, such a traveller can do without. There are Divine gifts which are very desirable and



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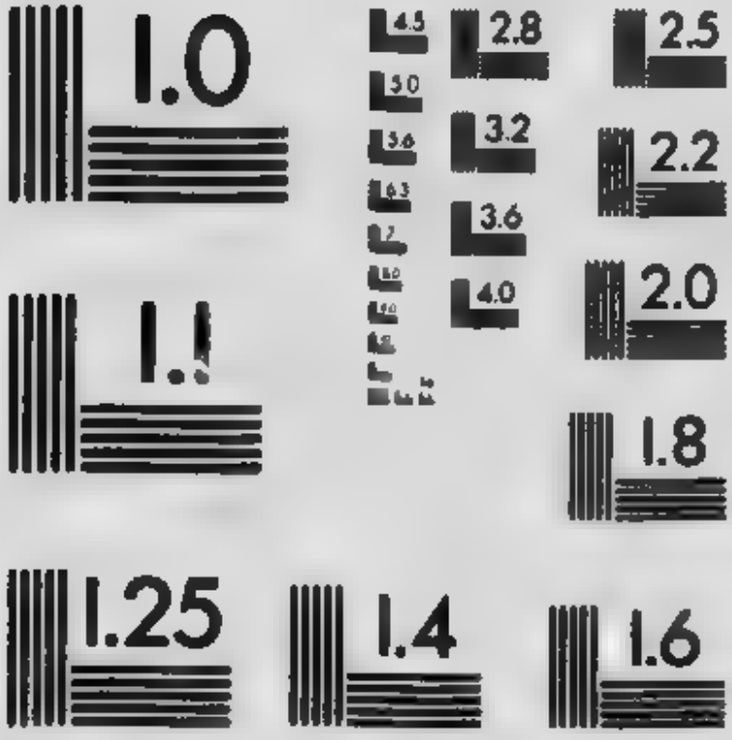

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very thankworthy, which, for a time at least, we can do without. God does not promise us as tourists provision, pleasantness, joy, and comfort at every stage. These are great blessings, and God grants them, yet not indispensable. But if we are travellers with a serious purpose, if we are to run right on to the end the race that is set before us, if we are to surmount every obstacle, reach the goal of our faith and aspirations, the one thing we do need, and can never do without, is strength—strength of courage, strength of patience, strength of endurance to the end. We must go from strength unto strength, until we appear before the God in Zion. I am afraid that many of us, even Christians, do not realize this. We have too much of the tourist's concern about our comforts—our spiritual comforts—by the way. Instead of just seeking first the Kingdom of God, we ask, "What 'spiritually' shall we eat? What shall we drink and wherewithal shall we be clothed?" We set too much store by religious luxuries. We put too much stress on being pleasantly interested; and our ministers have to prepare highly-spiced, and cunningly-compounded spiritual dishes to titillate our jaded palates. "The service this morning was most interesting or uninteresting. I liked the sermon; I enjoyed it very much." Really this is tourist talk. We are not, then, to

enjoy services and sermons, but to work out our own salvation, to fight the battles of the Lord. Does the sermon help you there? Is it real strengthening food to your soul? That is the question.

And some are much taken up with their religious feelings and experiences—their sense of inward repose and happiness. Well, some comparatively useless people abound in these things, and some great servants of God have but little. The first question is, "Have you enough to go on with?" Jesus was in utter poverty of spirit when He cried, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" but with that cry of God forsakenness He consummated all sacrifice, and struck His last blow for the world's salvation. And so, Brethren, our chief concern is never with what relates to ease and comfort by the way, but with what is essential to progress, endurance to the end. "Blessed is he that overcometh." And whether our path be through the pleasant fields of Beulah, or the deep Valley of Humiliation, or up the rugged Hill of Difficulty, we have need of a Divine strength. The faith which links us to Jesus Christ, the resolution which links us to our duty, the hope that links us to the heaven lying beyond, must not snap. We must have strength to hold on, and to hold out to the end.

II. Look next at the manifold sufficiency of the promise—as thy days. Now days have different characters and bring with them their every day needs. The strain of life shifts from time to time; the strength which suffices to-day would not avail for to-morrow. As in building one of these great bridges like those that span the St. Lawrence, the engineers must provide strength adequate to resist every strain; strength vertically to carry the enormous loads that are hauled over it; strength laterally that it may stand unshaken by the fiercest winds that blow; strength of material and foundation to sustain the weight of the whole vast structure, so do we in the course of our days need various kinds of spiritual strength. Sometimes it is strength of righteousness—of unyielding conscientious principle, that we may stand unmoved by the world's temptations, its threats, or its seductions. Sometimes strength of patient trustful endurance, to sustain us under the crushing load of grief or pain. And sometimes strength of active fortitude, to cleave our way through the opposi of circumstances—"the power to steer right ward without bating jot of heart or hope"—the strength of the traveller who holds on his way, though the sleet is dashing on his face, or the snow is gathering deep around his feet. And, always, it is strength of

faith and hope, to resist and neutralize the soul —corroding power of the world's fears and troubles—its great troubles and petty troubles, alike. And so in all needful fulness and variety, strength is promised, if we seek it at the right source. If, I say, we seek it at the right source. Where is that? It is not in nature. Sometimes you see a man who seems the type of self- sufficing strength. You see him in the prime of his mental power, and physical vigor, to all appearance fully equipped for the battle of life—with all the powers that laugh at difficulty and danger. You see him plant his feet firmly on the first rounds of the ladder by which he means to climb to high achievement and brilliant success. But, see him some stages further on, and what is it we sometimes behold? A man who is perhaps a living sacrifice to the world, its riven, care-worn slave: or, on the other hand, swollen and intoxicated with success—in either case, the victim of the world he meant to conquer. Or, you see him near the end of his race, when he has achieved much perhaps of what he set out to reach, a querulous, discontented old man, chafing under his infirmities, holding on weakly and miserably to a world with which he shall soon have no further concern. The proverb says, "Beginnings are difficult." Surely, not always. Beginnings are often easy, splendid,

most promising. But how much oftener in this world, do we see promising beginnings than victorious endings? "I have seen the thorn frown rudely all the winter long and after bear a rose upon its top, and the bark that all the way across the sea ran straight and speedy perish at the last, even in the harbour's mouth." A day will always come, it may come early in life, it may come late, it may not come till death, or till after death, it may come at any time, it will come some time, which will try a man down to the foundation, and which, if a man have not laid hold of the Lord Almighty and His strength, will discover the flaw in him and break him down—a day in which it would seem that only the strength of God's love and righteousness can suffice, and in which every life that is not rooted and grounded in that, will be seen to have ended in moral failure and collapse.

I put it to you especially, younger people, what is your confidence in looking forward to the great enterprise of life on which you have embarked? There are hindrances and dangers, far more than you can know of. From within is our great weakness, greater than we know,—our irresolution and vacillation, our ease-loving, pleasure-loving, lower nature, dragging all the time against our higher purposes and better self.

The path of duty will often be hardest when it is clearest, and will lead you into places where it needs a strong and patient heart to go. And yet, some of you, perhaps, ask hesitatingly, "Can I consent to carry the yoke of Christ all my life through?" Surely the question you ought to ask is a different one, "Can Christ carry me through? Can He bear my burden and strengthen my weakness and keep me so that I shall not make shipwreck, but that as my days, so shall my strength be?" And to that question there is but one answer from all who put Him to the proof. The only always sufficient, always available, power in the universe for all the needs of a man's soul, for labour, for obedience, for submission, for hope, for courage, for endurance unto the end, is the power of Jesus Christ, which was constantly manifested in His life on earth, which was victoriously manifested in His life on earth, and which He imparts according to their need, and according to their trust, to all who seek to follow in His steps.

III. Think of some of the "days" which come in every life, and of the strength that is needed for them, more in the day of toil, of hard and wearing, and it may be irksome labour. "So shall thy strength be." He, who never grew weary in well-doing, never faltered in His great life-task, till he could lay it down at His

Father's feet saying, "It is finished"—He, if He is our strength, will never fail you, till you too lay down your task at the Master's feet, and say, "Such as it is, needing much forgiveness for its blemishes and short-comings, it is finished." The day of temptation will come. Only let it, when it comes, find us praying, "Lead us not into temptation." He who in the wilderness met every attack with the Word of God, will give to us also such an answer to our souls and hold us fast by some principle of eternal truth, from which no temptation will be able to drag us. The day of trial and sorrow. He will give strength for that day too. He who yonder in the garden overcame nature's utmost agony, who bore the Cross that was weighted with all the load of the world's evil, shall He not give that strength which is made perfect in weakness—that last utmost strength to say: "The cup which my Father hath give me, shall I not drink it?" "Strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, unto all patience and long-suffering." For what is strength according to God's glorious power? To take kingdoms, overthrow strongholds, perform Herculean tasks? No, it is not in such things that the full strength of God is manifested, but in the patience and long-suffering of Christian men and women. Marvellous, is it not?—that God seeks no such

exalted mission for the glorious power of His Spirit than just that some lone woman may stay her heart in patience, some suffering man conquer his afflictions by patience, that you and I may do our duty and resist our temptations, and be uncomplaining and cheerful under all the vexations and frictions of daily life, as well as under the greater afflictions and sorrows that may come to us. And, to sum up all in that all inclusive promise, I take you back to the thought with which we started. We are travellers,—travellers into the unknown: but there is a staff for our pilgrimage on which our souls can lean. Here, amid all uncertainties, is the light of a great certainty shining on our path, like the gleaming of harbour lights across dark waters. "As thy days, so shall thy strength be." Going forth like Abraham of old, not knowing whither we go, but knowing Him who is our guide and strength, we may say:

> I see my way, as birds their trackless way.
> I shall arrive! What time, what circuit first,
> I ask not . . . . . .
> In good time, His good time, I shall arrive.
> He guides me and the birds.

Live for Christ's ends. Commit thy way unto the Lord, and He shall bring it to pass. He who upholds all things by the word of His power, He will uphold thy soul.

VI.

THE CHRISTIAN RACE—HOW TO RUN IT

Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily best us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us.—*Hebrews xii: 1.*

THERE are passages in the New Testament which might suggest that the Christian life is an easy and simple matter. It is represented as a natural progress. It is just to grow in grace. Our Lord Himself compares it with the natural growth of a plant:—first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear. What could be easier or more inevitable? Then, there are other passages which, like my text, represent it as a matter of serious difficulty—difficult at the beginning: we must strive to enter in at the straight gate; and growing no less difficult as it advances: we must take up our cross, fight a good fight, or, as here, run with concentrated purpose, and with enduring patience the race that is set before us. Ought we to conclude, then, that the Christian life is easy for some, difficult for others? Or, that it is sometimes easy, sometimes difficult, for everyone? On the contrary, both of these di-

verse representations are necessarily true, more or less, for everyone, more or less all the time. In fact, they are both necessarily true of every kind of life. Look at the growth of a plant. What can be more effortless, and spontaneous! Give it the necessary conditions of soil, atmosphere and temperature, and all is done by natural process. And yet that plant is fighting for its life all the time. Fighting grubs, parasites and insect pests; fighting the weeds around it for air and sunshine, fighting frost, perhaps, and drought and storm. Could the plant speak, it would say that all the time it is fighting a hard fight, running a race for its very life. So it is with the Christian life. Rooted in Christ, refreshed by the means of grace, quickened by the Holy Spirit, surrounded by the influences of the Kingdom of God, it grows by no effort of its own, but simply by absorbing the Divine elements in which it moves, and lives and has its being. Yet, from first to last it has strong antagonisms to overcome. Not a step is won without faithful effort. Its very growth is by warfare. Perhaps we may sum up the truth of the matter thus: in view of the things that are *for* us—the forces on our side—the Christian life *seems,* and *is* easy; in view of the things that are *against,* it *seems,* and *is* difficult. In view of the fact that the things that are for us, are greater than the

things that are against us, it is always possible, and its victory certain, if we are faithful and resolute. Now, the writer of the Epistle gives a vivid idea of all this under the figure of a race. He sees the competitors preparing for the race, laying aside all superfluous clothing, every encumbrance that might hinder speed or overtax endurance. He sees them running and straining onward, while the assembled spectators cheer on their favourite runner, or wait in breathless suspense as the climax of the contest is reached, and a final spurt decides the victory. And he makes all this do service in stimulating Christians to run the race. It may seem strange that Christians should need thus to be exhorted and spurred on. It might have been thought that it would be necessary rather to hold us in to moderate our zeal. It might have been predicted that the faults of Christians would be chiefly faults of excess, that they would strive after ideal excellence, until they became quixotic and unpractical.

Last Sunday morning we tried to lay to heart one of our great encouragements. We are not the first runners in the race. We are compassed about with a great and ever-growing cloud of witnesses. We run our race ideally, perhaps actually, under the eyes of that great victorious host. Let us consider this evening how we are to run it.

In the first place, take the general idea. We are to lay aside. We are assured of this, that we can run well only by laying aside. That is elementary enough. Why, even to run an impromptu race at a picnic, a man lays aside his coat, loosens his collar and tie, and flings them on the ground. And that is a kind of symbol of life. Look, and you will see that always progress is possible only by laying aside. "When I was a child," says St. Paul, "I thought as a child and spake as a child. When I became a man I put away childish things." Youth lays aside the habits of childhood, and mature manhood those of youth. So it is in all progress we make in the pursuit of truth. Any real progress in knowledge, any grasp of higher truth, is marked by the laying aside of some opinions and prejudices, and of our pride in them, or indolent satisfaction in them. So it is with our moral progress. It means not only, perhaps, the laying aside of some bad habit, the conquering of some disposition, but the laying aside of a lower point of view by rising to a higher. This laying aside in order to progress is also the law of industrial progress. The mill may be filled with expensive machinery, but the progressive manufacturer does not hesitate to scrap it, if something more effective is invented. Candles are laid aside for lamps, lamps for gas, gas for electric light, electric

light for some better illuminant. And the man or community that will not conform to this law of laying aside will, as all acknowledge, be left inevitably, hopelessly behind in the race.

One of our great needs to-day is efficiency; and everyone is familiar with the principle that, in ordinary matters, efficiency is only possible by laying aside. If you want to do anything pre-eminently well, you must prepare to leave some other things undone. The way of efficiency is narrow, and it is impossible for any one to drive in it a larger team than there is room for. There are few of us, I imagine, who, as life goes on, do not feel it increasingly necessary to prune the tree, that it bear less foliage and more fruit.

And that is the truth which the Epistle seeks to bring home to us here. All the progress. all the efficiency in the Christian life, are subject to this same condition of laying aside. Either there is that which you must lay aside in order to begin running the race at all, or if you are running there is something which the heat of the race will compel you to lay aside. I believe it to be absolutely true, then, that every new step you win, is marked by some laying aside. Any real progress in Christian understanding, any full insight into the truth as it is in Jesus, require the laying aside of some preconceived, perhaps some very cherished, opinion. For every step of pro-

gress in Christian character, there will be the laying aside of some inclination, habit, disposition, or point of view. In every course of strenuous service in God's kingdom we enter, there will be the laying aside of some inferior interest. And, as the track of a fugitive might be followed by the garments and accoutrements he has been compelled to cast away in his flight, so the earnest Christian's course might be traced by the sins and weights laid aside, left behind, as he presses to the goal.

So far, the general idea is clear. But when we seek the exact meaning of the terms in which it is expressed, we find ourselves on more debatable ground. The encumbrances we are directed to lay aside, are of the kind described as weights and sins. We are to lay aside the sin that doth so easily beset us—literally the "sin that stands well around us"—that clings closely to us, and impedes our movements. Just as to come to the starting point wearing the toga, the long flowing robe which was the ordinary dress in ancient times, would have been simply to make the race ridiculous, so, for one to pretend to run the Christian race without laying aside sin, is to show that he does not take it in any serious sense. It would be like the sack-race which you have seen boys running, and which is meant to be a mere farce. Sin must be laid aside. Otherwise

it will trip you up, or, like a clinging garment, paralyze your efforts at every step.

For, it is not one sin that is here spoken of, —not one particular *besetting sin,* according to the common understanding of the word. It is sin in general,—the thing we call sin in whatever form it takes, that bests us, compasses us about, and must be laid aside. And yet, the common interpretation of the word is practically right. For most people, sin means especially *A* sin. Our allegiance to good is not tested by all the Ten Commandments, but usually by one or two. We do not fight the whole Philistine host. A Goliath steps out and challenges us. It may be pride, it may be passion, it may be envy, it may be an unforgiving, rancorous heart, it may be sensual appetite, it may be covetousness and greed. By the single sin men are slain, and in smiting this Goliath the day is theirs.

Men sometimes flatteringly estimate themselves by the enumeration of the sins with which they are *not* chargeable. They thank God they are not as other men. A case of scandalous commercial dishonesty is brought to light, and straightway men draw themselves up and say, "Thank God, I am not like that. I have always been straight." A man whose language is foul and whose heart fouler, makes his boast that he is energetic and industrious, and thanks God

that he is not like that lazy loafer. The prodigal, wasting his substance, and throwing away his soul in riotous living, thanks God that he is not a hypocrite or a money grub. By such negatives we can make ourselves out to be well on the way to perfection. But, that is all beside the point. The question is: Is a man laying aside the sin that is his sin?

In mechanics, nothing is stronger than its weakest part. A chain is no stronger than its weakest link; a ship no stronger than its weakest plate. In the war just now, the opposing forces are not in a perpetual death-grapple all along the line; but all the time they are putting out feelers, probing and testing at this point and that, to discover, if possible, the weak spot in the enemy's defense. So it is in character. Life brings its pressure to bear upon the weak point Never mind about the strong point. How about the critical place where you are especially assailable? Are you keeping the enemy out there? If it be so, if our weak places are indeed being made strong, we may indeed rejoice. But, be sure, that without laying aside the sin that besets, there is no real running of the race, and that we can never attain to unity of purpose and effort. Surely nothing more needs to be said. If any man will run the Christian race, he must lay aside whatever he knows to be wrong. And we

are compassed about with a great cloud of witnesses who all tell us, that by seeking and trusting the help of God, it can be done; who tell us, too, that to conquer here, is indeed to be more than conquerors; that sin subdued becomes glory and strength; that the frailty and failure of nature overcome, are the brightest jewel of the victor's crown.

But another class of encumbrances is to be laid aside,—here described as weights. And, indeed, a Christian's danger seldom comes from things that are positively and patently wrong. To the great majority of us, it is no great self-denial not to drink, and gamble, or to give a wide berth to coarse pleasures and degrading company. In the majority of cases, the things which prevent men from becoming Christians, and which most of all hinder the progress of those who are Christians, are things that in themselves, and in their own place are harmless, nay, useful and good. And if we ask, what *are* the things, that thus may become weights and hindrances, we ask a question which in one sense it is easy to answer: and in another sense impossible. It is easy, for one word answers it—anything, everything. As human ingenuity can distil poison from God's fairest flowers, so there is a mysterious power we all possess of perverting the best things God has given us, whether of soul

or circumstance. It may be our work or our necessary business, or our pastimes and social engagements. It may be our bodily appetites, and habits, or our intellectual tastes and pursuits. It may be even our home and our dearest affections—anything, everything.

And so there are weights which we obviously cannot, and are not meant to lay aside. And the idea of race is not, after all, an exhaustive idea of the Christian life. To make it so is the way to madness. I was reading last week the story of a Roman noble in the fifth century, one Paulinus, who suddenly gave up all his estates, all his public functions and duties, to bury himself in a hermitage. In one of his letters, still extant, this Paulinus highly praises a certain Christian lady, because she totally neglected her own children in order exclusively to devote herself to the religious life. To such a diseased extravagance of folly does the idea lead, that the less we have to do with anything except religion, the more religious shall we be. No! It is a poor business which cannot find occupation for all its hands. A religion which does not provide for all the interests of our nature, and interests of our life, is a poor, crippled religion. Such a religion Christianity is not. A good Christian is not one who is good in a vacuum. He is good all the time; good in business; a good citizen; a good

patriot; good in all the relations of life. The idea of a race, I repeat, is not an exhaustive idea of the Christian life. That is the one big mistake of Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, wonderful book as it is. No! We are not mere racing yachts; we are ships meant to carry a cargo; and what we need is not so much a lighter cargo as stronger engines. "I will run the way of Thy Commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart," says the Psalmist. God give us that—the larger, stronger, more loving heart. Then our necessary weights will only steady us; our daily work become a path, in which we walk even as Christ walked, and all our natural ties, duties, pleasures and enjoyments, draw our hearts to God in love and thankfulness.

Nevertheless we must lay aside every weight that can be rightly laid aside if it hinders progress. When we are perfect, nothing will be a weight to us. But we have to serve God in our present actual state. We have to serve Him with limited means, with limited time, and, alas, also, with limited love. And the one secret of success for people with limited resources is concentration. And as we have to do everything in this world with limited resources, the key to life is concentration; and the bane of life is indiscriminateness. Every flight of wild geese in the sky tells you the power that secures the maxi-

mum of motion, with the minimum of expenditure. *It is the wedge.* And we all know that a man must make himself a wedge, if he wants to make his way in the world. He must be firm where others are movable. He must narrow himself to the force of a compact purpose, and so drive his way, wedge-like, through the crowd of people who have no compact purpose. Whether it is worth a man's while to narrow himself to a wedge for such a purpose, is a different question. But it is the secret of power—one secret at least. It has been Germany's secret. We blame Germany for concentrating on militarism. Our one national fault was, that we did not concentrate sufficiently on that, or anything else. The great lesson and benefit of the war will have been lost upon us, unless it give deeper unity, and purpose, and driving power to our national and individual life. We must stop drifting, and think more clearly, and more and more steadily. The Empire needs this. We need to have a clearer vision of what the goal of Empire is; what meaning and character we want it to possess. The Church needs it. We all need it, in order to unify our conceptions of the main purpose of the life we have to lead, so that, laying aside every weight we may run the race set before Empire, Church, and each of us.

Now, I shall not attempt to set forth in detail

the things which may be our weights and hindrances in running the Christian race. As I said, that is a question which it is impossible to answer. No man can tell us how to live, except in a general way. Our own experience tells us. When we sit down at a repast we know what things are good for us, what we should leave untouched, or partake of with caution. Others about us may indulge where we cannot; or we may where they cannot. Experience teaches us, provided that we desire to learn. No man can lay down rules for another. And so it is in the Christian life. Here, to quote one of our wisest teachers, here is the ennobling peculiarity of Christianity. It puts us in charge of ourselves. It lays on us the task of judging what is good for us. But this freedom, while it ennobles and educates, leaves on us a heavy responsibility. It expects us to be true, to be watchful, to work out our own salvation. Is our Christian life always having the upper hand? Is it the great, main stream, drawing all other streams, as tributary, unto itself, and giving them its own colour, fed by them and absorbing them? That is the test.

And, surely, my Brethren, it behoves us to see that it is the best that becomes dominant with us, that our life gathers its forces around the one thing worthy of them all,—the service of Jesus Christ, our Saviour and King, the race, to run

which, is to live righteously, soberly, and holy in this present world, to finish which, is to attain to the perfect everlasting good. Dear Brethren, let us on this Communion Sunday, once more resolve to make God's aim for us our own. We are to run the great race. We are to run it encompassed with a great cloud of witnesses. We are to run it looking unto Jesus, and looking unto Him, we are to run it with patience, laying aside every weight, and the sin that doth so easily beset us. This is the sublime life God sets before every one of us. Shall we not set it before ourselves? Sure that if we have to lay anything aside, it will be only that which it is not good for us to keep, and that if we have to lay aside some things that we might desire to keep, Christ will give us a hundredfold better, sure, too, that such laying aside is the shortest, the surest, and, indeed, the only way to the possession of all things. May He incline and strengthen our hearts unto this, for His own Name's sake! Amen.

VII.

LIFE BUILDING

Every man's work shall be made manifest; for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.

If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward.—*I Corinthians iii:13, 14.*

WE are all builders—on one foundation or another—in one fashion or another. We are all certainly building. Sometimes we speak of a man as having been the architect of his own fortunes. He has shaped his own course, made his own opportunities, to himself belongs the praise or the blame attaching to what he has made of his life. But it is only in a comparative and limited sense that this can be said of any man's worldly career. It is far truer to say that what every man builds is himself; that every man is the architect of his own character, and of all that flows out of and gathers around his character. And while all are building, we are doing many things. The one thing we are doing all the time, is the making of the building of life itself. We do not get ourselves ready-made, but we get material out of which we are destined to build up the ultimate self. And as out of the

same quarry one may build a temple and another a prison, so do men build their lives out of their environment, as the lily and the rose build up a shrine of fragrance and beauty out of the same sort of atmosphere and sunshine which furnish the nettle and the thistle only with stings and prickles. Brethren, that is what the world really is. It is the environment of the soul. Our circumstances, our work, our play, our relations to our fellowmen, the home, the church, the State, the vicissitudes of life, all are just material for life-building—the clay out of which the Potter shapes the vessel according to His will. All the materials, the gold, silver, precious stones, also the wood, hay, stubble are placed within our reach. But these take the form we give them. We are the builders. That is essential to the idea of man as a spiritual being. That is the mark of man's greatness—that he is the architect and builder of himself. In this consists the seriousness and responsibility of life. A famous philosopher has said, "Wouldst thou attain unto thy highest, go, look upon a flower. What it does without a will, do thou willingly." So do we as spiritual beings, in our environment of earthly conditions and elements, build up a structure which is to last forever—the structure of life, of character, of *the self*.

And consider for a moment, further, what is

implied in the idea of building that makes it truly descriptive of human life. Building is a process, gradual, continuous, progressive, cumulative—a process of addition. You are always doing new work, but upon the basis of the old work. What is built to-day, is laid upon what was built yesterday. So it is in our life. We do not make each day a fresh beginning, nor do we make each year a fresh beginning. There is no absolutely fresh beginning. Our days, our years, our activities, as we live them, are not like beads on a string. They are links in a welded chain. They are not like stones set down side by side in the ground which may afterwards be put in position. They are built on top of one another—row upon row. Ah! seldom do we realize what a connected, continuous growing our whole life is; how the feelings we cherish become dispositions; how the words we speak, the silent deeds we do, become settled habits. And ceaselessly, ceaselessly, as the heart beats, the life-building is going forward—the spiritual fabric is rising, and coming always nearer to its final form.

Let us listen, then, to St. Paul with regard to this building. First he tells us that for any hopeful life-building there must be a right foundation. For this, he asserts, there is only one Foundation, Christ, the eternal Christ. And I do not think there could be a better expression of

what Christianity is, alike in faith and practice, than to say that it is building one's life upon Christ. What is it to build one's life upon Christ? Well, it does not mean, in the first place, accepting certain dogmatic propositions about Christ. In the first place, I would say, it is to accept Christ's interpretation of life. It is to have Christ's view of what life is—to mean what He means by it. If we are to live coherently at all, and not simply be whirled about like dead leaves on a gusty day, we must get hold of some principle of living; must get beneath the changing aspect of things, to something on which we can rest as eternal truth. Life is the thing all men want to build, and in their blundering way are trying to build. But what *is* life? How does it fulfill itself? About this every man has his own idea, at least his own instinctive feeling. Prodigal enjoyment, the prodigal will say; decent comfort, the elder brother will say; ambition, adventure, wealth, power, others will say; work, achievement, doing things, another. No! Christ says it is none of these. A man may gain all these, and lose his real life. Some of these things are outside a man; life is within. Some of these things are merely animal; life is spiritual; life is divine. It is what men have in common with God. Life is truth, purity, goodness. Life is love. Brethren, do we thus build on

Christ? Do we entirely accept Christ as what St. John calls "The Word of Life"—the true Interpretation of life? Do we accept the spiritual meaning of life, and *love* as its universal secret? Do we believe with Jesus Christ that if we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and we in Him? Do we believe in Christ so as to desire Him as our chief good, to be what He is in spirit and character? Then, so far, we make Christ the foundation of our life-building.

But we who are weak and sinful need, not only a rock of faith on which to build—we need the rock of salvation. I have said that in building there is never a fresh start. But in our life-building we do want fresh starts. We want to make a fresh start, some of us, with this New Year. We want to make a fresh start every new day. And we cannot begin afresh, just as we are. No! What we have built well or ill we have built. Our past clings to us; it demands its rights. No more than the undischarged bankrupt can begin to build up a fortune, can we, just as we are, begin to build up our true life and our true life work in God's sight. You cannot build properly upon debt. Our Father, forgive us our *debts*. This is our need—a power to deliver us from the past—a power to lift us above ourselves, and strengthen us with all might. We need One who will look with infinite mercy on

our failures, Who will have boundless patience with our weaknesses and stupidities, Whose love will endure all things, hope all things for us, and never fail, and to trust Jesus Christ for all this. All that is needed to begin, continue, and accomplish our ideal—nay, higher far. His ideal for us. That is to build our life upon Him. Trust in Christ's interpretation of life, and trust in Him as the hope and strength of sinful man, seeking to attain that life,—both are included when St. Paul says, "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ."

But the next thing of which the Apostle warns us is, that upon this same foundation it is possible to raise very different sorts of superstructure. Clearly, and frankly, we recognize that Christian men may make very poor work of their lives, and even on the divine foundation, may rear what is incongruous with it, a flimsy, perishable edifice, wood, hay, stubble; low, wordly views; crooked, worldly policies; evil tempers, self-seeking ambitions, self-indulgent pleasures—all manner of things that are utterly out of place in that building, that are inspired, not by the spirit of Christ, but by the spirit of the world. For the purpose of illustrating this principle St. Paul has taken extreme cases, in fact, impossibly extreme. As the mathematician for the purpose of illustrating his principle, sup-

poses a perfect circle, a perfect square, although no such thing exists in nature, so St. Paul supposes two cases that do not in fact exist—the Christian builder, who builds nothing but what corresponds to the Christian foundation; and the other, who builds nothing that does. What Christian is there in whose life everything is gold, silver, and precious stones? And how could he be in any sense a Christian at all, in whose building all is wood, hay, stubble? Still, the question is pressed upon us—how, and what, we are building—how far Christian aims and motives inspire us, for instance, in our worldly calling, in our use of our means, in our citizenship, in our social intercourse and home life; whether there may not be features, perhaps extensive features, of our daily life that are in no way really Christian, that might far rather be built on some other foundation than Jesus Christ. Travellers tell us that in some of the ruined cities of the East, the few poverty-stricken inhabitants built their wretched sheds against the massive walls of ancient palaces and temples; and thus one half of a man's house is marble or granite, and the other half crumbling clay. And it is rather with the same grotesque contrast that many Christian men and women build their lives. That they are at heart resting on the divine foundation, that there is some tie of faith

and love between them and the Saviour, cannot be doubted. But what is Christian in their lives is so mixed and entangled with what is non-Christian—they have done so little really Christian work, in their own character in the world, that their lives must be written down as we from the Christian view of largely abortions and failures.

And what must be the end of this? Such an one will be himself saved, but his work will perish. It will be burned. When Christ comes to judge and the light of His face is turned upon the activities of men, the wood, hay and stubble, everything in which there has not been the spirit of Christ will be consumed. He who has thus builded will be himself saved, yet so as by fire. He will be saved as a man saved, whose house is burned over his head, or who is stripped of all his labours, and is barely dragged to safety through the flames. He does only not make complete shipwreck. He scrambles naked to the shore; but the vessel, the cargo, and all the profit of the venture, have gone down in the whelming waves. Now what definite idea had St. Paul in his mind when he spoke of being saved as by fire? I do not venture to say. But, take it out of the language of symbol, and the meaning is just this—that we may do a life work here, which has no permanent value and significance. The

objects which we have lived for, the things we have worked at, have no place in the eternal order. They do not count in the real life building. They have nothing in them but what is of the world, and, in the end, remain only as the melancholy cinders of an extinguished fire. Nothing will come of them except the ugly gap left—the gap which ought to have been filled with gold, silver and precious stones. In that way they count—*by the gap left.* So St. Paul warns us we may waste our lives. And remember, it is not mere worldlings he is speaking of. It is Christian men and women. So we may throw away immortal powers on what will melt and disappear like an ice palace, when the thaw comes, or flare up like a straw-built hovel at the touch of fire. My brethren, that is the fate of everything that has not the spirit of Christ in it. Everything that has Christ in it, lives forever. Everything that has not Christ in it, dies. This old world is already crowded with the graves of dead works, dead empires and civilizations, dead literature, dead enterprises and achievements, every kind of dead enterprise of dead men. And all the activities of the living world to-day—its empires, its wars and politics, its business, its literature and sciences, except in so far as they carry in them the life giving spirit of Christ, will one day be dead as ancient Nineveh. So, in

our own lives. All the self-seeking plans, all the God-forgetting deeds, all the toil and trouble which have been taken for merely worldly ends, the very achievements on which perhaps we have prided ourselves most, if there is nothing of Christ in them, will be burned out of the fabric of our life-building. Would to God that we might realize this far more than we do! How much of human toiling and striving; how much of our own, would be crushed into nothingness when judged by the verdict of Christ? Gutted by the Divine Fire, how much of the building would be left? It is said that in a churchyard in Germany two tombstones stand side by side. The epitaph on the one is the simple, single word "Vergeben"—forgiven: on the other the single word "Vergabens"—in vain. For such as the Apostle here speaks of, both these epitaphs must be combined. We are forgiven. Their life energy is largely labour lost. But that is not the only possibility. Let us look at the brighter side of this judgment scene. Every man's work shall abide. Yes! Living here in a transient world, expending our energies on its affairs, we do much that will survive time, and death, and judgment; much that has indestructible value—by which eternity itself will be enriched. We build here, within this scaffolding of time, that which, when the scaffolding is taken down, will

only stand revealed in its intrinsic beauty and worth. Yes! If any man's work shall abide, he shall receive a reward. He shall come rejoicing in the great harvest day, bringing his sheaves with him. He shall be welcomed like a richly-laden vessel to the harbor. He shall find all he has committed to Christ safely kept against that day. He shall find it all awaiting him, not as he gave it, but multiplied with a divine increase, transmuted with the pure gold of heaven. We cannot carry our wood, hay, stubble into another life. Thank God for that assurance! We cannot desire to carry on that kind of building there. But not one precious stone of Christ-like act which you have built into your life, not one particle of the gold and silver of lowly endeavour and self-sacrificing service, will be lost. The fires that consume all else, will only reveal in its true character, all that belongs to Jesus Christ—everything wrought in love, obedience, and loyalty to Him. You do not know how glorious your fidelity will then appear; you do not guess what recognition your humble service will receive. "Lord, when saw we Thee an hungered and fed thee; and thirsty and gave Thee drink?" Ye builded better than you knew. He will say, "Inasmuch as ye did it unto the least of one of these, ye did it unto Me." And many whom the world in its blindness classes among

the lower orders, and whose life-work it never notices or hears of, will, in that day when all values are rightly judged, be found to have been right skilful workmen; while the work of others, though it has bulked largely in the world's eye, will be found to have possessed no enduring quality. My brethren, the years roll on, and, as they roll, remind us that the night cometh when no man can work. We must work. But at *whatever* our hand findeth to do? No, not that; not *whatever* your hand findeth to do. You must select. Indiscrimination is the bane of life. To build, wood, hay, stubble, though you do it with your might, makes sorry life-building. We must work the work of God while it is day. We must build on the one foundation, gold, silver, precious stones. What is it to do that? What is it to build the right materials on the right foundation? It is to do the work given us to do, whatever that may be, to whittle straws, to preach the Gospel in the spirit of Christ. It is to live the life of duty in the spirit of love. That is the blessed life, the life which is of eternal worth, which is its *own* reward—the life of which we can never have enough, but of which we can have as much as we choose. Would we not wish this year, to build better than we have ever done before. Yes! We all wish that. We must not only wish; we must choose and determine by the

help of God to do it. Daily seek that help to guide your hand, and strengthen your heart, to give you wisdom and understanding. Daily look to Him on whom you build as your foundation and you will find in your environment, all the materials you need for a life-building that will stand forever.

VII.

RECONSTRUCTION

"O House of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter?" saith the Lord. "Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in mine hand, O House of Israel."— *Jeremiah xviii: 6.*

THE Potter and the Clay is a parable of the making, the marring, the re-making of human lives—the parable of happy as well as humbling significance, a message of divine hope for the world and for every man in it.

First, it is a parable of the making of man. Pottery is one of our few surviving handicrafts. This is the age of machinery, and though the burden of human toil is much lightened and production cheapened, one is sometimes tempted to question whether this gain is not counterbalanced by the loss in other directions. The workman becomes very much a part of the machine. His work evokes nothing of the creator or the artist in him. No thought of his own mind, no deftness of his own hand, go into its production. But even the humblest craftsman, the potter moulding an earthen pot out of the shapeless clay, the blacksmith hammering out a horse's shoe, works, not only with material, but with thought and imagination. There is the working

out of an idea. The hand-made product, unlike the machine-made, has an individuality, something of its maker's self stamped upon it.

Then, Brethren, none of God's works are machine-made. There are no stereotyped patterns, no fixed moulds in creation. No two worlds, no two leaves on a tree, are exactly the same. God never repeats himself. Consider how marvellous human individuality is, no human face, no human soul has a duplicate. Of all earth's millions there is not one who has not characteristics that are his own, his own individual outlook on life, his own experience of life into which no one else can fully enter. The Creator does not make men by the gross. Each of us embodies some distinct conception and ideal of humanity existing in the Mind of God. Brethren, that is a wonderful thought. There is in each of us a self the world has never seen, that we ourselves have never seen, that we only sometimes seem to get a fleeting and distant glimpse of—the man God meant when He made us, our ideal self, our potential self, our true self as God sees it, as it exists in His mind and purpose. God, our Potter, puts the clay upon His wheel, and moulds it with His hands. The Potter's wheel—that is life. That is the meaning of all this strange and changeful life—its laughter, its tears, its strains and its relaxations,

its pleasant things that make the heart dance with joy, its grim experiences that clutch the heart with a grip of iron. It is the wheel on which the Potter seeks to shape us to His mind, sometimes with light delicate touch, bringing out lines of grace and beauty, sometimes with firm, severe pressure, removing excrescences, or adding strength where it is needed. We shall never understand life at all, until we understand that it is the Potter's wheel. The Potter's wheel and the Potter's hand are working together upon us. Brethren, be sure of it. There is a certain best possibility for each of us, that which we ought to become, and may become, which God will help us to become, if we will. The whole plan of our life is laid out for that, a plan which, could we read it, as we may one day read it, is a never-ending study in the love and faithfulness of God. See that mother bending over the cradle! There her first born lies sleeping. See the tender light that shines in her eyes, the smile that comes and goes like a sunbeam on her face! She is dreaming "what manner of child shall this be?" She is building "castles in the air." If only she might have her way, what goodness, and greatness and happiness, should be the portion of that young life! But, no mother ever wished so much for her child as God wishes and proposes for His children.

What a thought that is for every one of us to carry! Brethren, we are God's workmanship. There is a pattern of each of us in the mind of Him Who made us. There is a perfection for each of us to reach—a crown of life for each to win. We live in God's thought of us. We fill a place in His everlasting purpose. That is our birthright. There is for each of us this original possibility—the greatest and best—when we are first placed upon the Potter's wheel.

And the second great truth here is, that, more or less, we fail to realize this initial possibility. Some seem to fail entirely. All good possibility in them seems to have run to evil. But, more or less, we all fail. There is no human life that can show its measure of accomplished good. Few fulfill even human expectations. Any one who has spent his youth at the University, for example, must realize that. That class of which he himself was one—the brightest, cleverest young manhood of the nation—had intellect enough, ambition enough, opportunity enough to make the future of each one of high accomplishment, to secure for each the possibility of being a powerful influence for good in the world. But, in after years, only a few out of many such possibilities are fulfilled. The moral force is lacking. Men give themselves to the pursuit of inferior aims, or turn

aside into easy self-indulgent ways, and sink to a lower plane in the scale of life. But who is there that is not conscious of failure? Who can assert that he has lived up even to his own imperfect ideals? Who can flatter himself that his life has been the best that was possible to him? Brethren, I know not whether we shall ever be permitted in the hereafter to read the transcript of God's original thought of what our life might have been, had we only yielded ourselves fully to His hands that reached down from heaven moulding men. But who, even now, does not know enough to wish *to be made again,* as it seems good to the Potter?

Let us think then of this re-making of life. *He made it again.* The Potter could not make what He would have wished, but He did His best with the materials He had. So God is always trying to do His best for us. If we have refused the very best, still, there is a next best. God puts us on the wheel again, and gives us the chance of that. If innocence is lost, repentance is left. If yesterday is lost, to-day is left. If one door is closed, another remains open. If we have sold our birthright, our Father has still a rich blessing in reserve. The Potter made it again. Oh, words of hope! He turned a failure into a success *of a different kind.* Cannot I do with *you,* as this Potter, saith the Lord.

In Florence there stands a colossal statue, Michael Angelo's David, representing the shepherd lad in the act of slinging the stone at the Philistine giant. He stands erect, but the body is slightly curved, in poise to hurl the fatal missile. That statue had a remarkable history. Long before, a sculptor had fetched a huge slab of marble from Carrara, and had blocked it out. But he had proved a sorry bungler, cutting a great slice out of one side and spoiling the marble. Neither he nor anyone else could see how a statue could be made of it, and it lay useless for a century, until Michael Angelo's eye saw its possibilities and set to work upon it, adapting the ruinous defect in it to the poise of the curved figure. And thus he wrought out his design, making the very mutilation of the marble serve his purpose. So does God take the failure, the remains of a human life, and fashion them anew. God takes Saul of Tarsus as his piece of clay, puts him on the wheel, and takes him to Jerusalem, where he hears the preaching of Stephen. And who can tell what kind of Christian, and Apostle Paul would have been, if he had not then yielded, instead of kicking against the pricks? But God puts this piece of obdurate clay a second time upon the wheel, takes the persecutor, and blasphemer, and murderer of the saints,

and tries him again with the heavenly vision. And what a vessel the Potter makes of him at the second attempt! The blind zeal of the Pharisee changed into the open-eyed zeal of the Cross! The man himself, made the chosen vessel to carry the mercy of God far and wide among the natives!

I have said that there is always a "next best" open to us. Is it always just a "next best?" I do not know that we can say so. All that we can say is, that it is something different. I do not know that Paul with Stephen's blood upon him, conscious always of being the chief of sinners, and a miraculous example of God's mercy, was a "next best." I do not think we can judge of that. The parable only says that, at the second attempt, the Potter made a different vessel from that which he had intended to make. Yet, like Michael Angelo's statue, that different thing may be a very perfect and a very splendid thing—a masterpiece of genius.

Now, how often we see the truth of this in everyday life! Men miss their first chances by carelessness and self-indulgence, or by blundering and mistaking their way. Others never take that place in the world which they might have taken, still there is a wonderful power of recovery in the economy of Providence. The bright, promising student has not become a brill-

iant light in the world but he is plodding, hardworking pastor or doctor, who thinks sometimes with a sigh of the untrodden heights; yet thanks God for what he is, rejoicing that the greatest Master bore with his short-comings and re-shaped him for other, yet honourable and worthy ends.

But this word, "He made it again," goes into the deepest things of life. This doctrine of a second chance is one of the glories of the Bible. It is the Gospel—the good news which we all need—Christ's Gospel to all who have failed, to all who have blundered, to all who have sinned. De Quincey used to say that the books which will be opened at the day of Judgment are simply the books of memory, with all their grim record of our failures and transgressions. If that were the whole message of the Bible, the Bible would be the Book of Despair. But what the Gospel proclaims is that, indestructible as the past is, irrevocable as are its consequences, yet every man made in God's image is capable of another chance; and if, though we have failed and fallen, we have not lost the longing for higher things, then He is ready to make the marred vessel over again. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. George Meredith has said that no man

can think, and not think hopefully; and certainly that is true when we think of God, and all that his love can accomplish. "Cannot I do with you as this Potter?" What can we do, but go to God and ask him for the new chance? Have we lost battles? There is time to fight one more, and win. Have we lost opportunities? It is not too late to find new ones, and to use them better. Perhaps the opportunity someone has missed has been the greatest of all. You have been called again and again to lay hold of spiritual life in Jesus Christ. You have sometimes had a summons to live for greater things than business or pleasure, but you heard as if you heard it not, and closed your eyes against the light. Awake thou that sleepest! To-day comes to you another chance. To-day your salvation stands again at the door and knocks. Christ will make of you yet what will fill you with eternal wonder and thankfulness, if only now you will hear His voice and open to Him the door. My Brethren, that is what God's forgiveness means. It is not merely letting us off the consequences of our sins—in fact, it is not that at all. It is His making us again. His infinite power, His infinite yearning to help us to repair our errors, to conquer over sins, and become better and stronger men by repentance, to make us what we are still capable of becoming—vessels meet

for the Master's use. And it is this we need—need all the time, on to the end—to put off the old man, and put on the new man, God means us to be—to turn, by God's grace, old failures into new success, to forget the things which are behind, and to reach out to those which are before.

And this message of Divine hope should come to us with special emphasis at the present time. It is a time in which God has arisen for the re-making of a world which has failed. It is too vast a work for us fully to comprehend. But, at anyrate, we feel, everyone must surely feel, that the war is something God wants to use as an effective means to show the nations that they have failed. From all our religious leaders there comes the call to national repentance. But what are we to repent of? Wherein have we failed? Well, Brethren, that is a question that it would take volumes to answer. Yet the answer may be given fundamentally in one word—Christlessness, or, what is another name for the same thing, selfishness, the selfishness of militarism, the selfishness of a pleasure-seeking, comfort-worshipping life, the selfishness of a mammon worship, a far subtler and more pervasive force than even militarism. Thank God! It is losing its spell. But are not certain phases at least, of mammon-worship losing their glam-

our too? Mere worldly success is not the honoured and attractive thing it was. Men who are making their pile out of the nation's calamity are not in good repute. Is not the mammon-god losing something of its tinsel glitter? Are we not beginning to see that when men enter upon business with a determination to succeed at any cost, and at anyone's expense, when men are determined to amass wealth whether they contribute to well-being or not, that is just war, just the twin spirit of militarism? Are we not beginning to see that if the world is to be made again, reconstructed according to God's purpose, that too, as well as militarism, must go.

Brethren, we have passed through stern days; and stern days are yet in front of us. But it is not for us merely to bow our necks to the yoke that is laid upon us. Christ, is saying, "Take My yoke upon you." There is the dawning of a great spiritual opportunity in the world's night. God is beckoning us to something larger and nobler that lies beyond the dust of battle and the thunder of the guns. And when I say beckoning us, I mean you and me. I do not know what national repentance is except the repentance of the people that constitute the nation. You cannot organize repentance. You cannot organize a movement like that in advance of the spirit of the people. Let us each seek to

embody the spirit of Christ in our own lives. Let God make us again. So only shall humanity be wrought over into the shape of God's ideals, and let us be filled with the strength and courage of a great hope, hope in God.

> These things shall be, a loftier race
> Than e'er the world hath known shall rise,
> With fire of freedom in their souls,
> And light of knowledge in their eyes.

"Cannot I do with you even as this Potter?" saith the Lord.

IX.

THE LADDER FROM EARTH TO HEAVEN

And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set upon the earth, and the top of it reached to Heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it.—*Gen. xxviii: 12.*

And He saith unto them: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see Heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."—*John i: 51.*

"SURELY the Lord is in this place," said Jacob, "and I knew it not" It does not follow that God is not here, because we do not discern his presence. We may see nothing in the universe except earth and sky; but God is there. We may see nothing in the Bible except chapter and verse; but God is there. We may see nothing in the Church but eloquence, organization and finance; yet God is there. We may see nothing in our cross, save the agony and the sting; but God is there. Our faith does not bring His presence, neither do our blindness and unbelief annihilate it. But God is seeking us, and laying His hand upon us, even when we are not seeking Him.

Thou hast been with me in the dark and cold,
And all the night I thought I was alone;
The chariots of thy glory round me rolled,
On me attending, yet by me unknown
The darkness of my night has been Thy day;

My stony pillow was thy ladder's rest;
And all Thine angels watched my couch of clay
To bless the soul, unconscious it was blest.

So it was with Jacob. Till his eyes were opened, the rocky heights of Bethel were to him a God-forsaken desert. He thought himself a God-forsaken soul. He had plotted and lied to obtain a great birthright, and here he was a poor waif, a banished man, lying down like a wild beast with nothing between him and the earth, with nothing between him and the sky, with nothing to speak to him but the voice of his own remorse, and nothing to look upon except the haunting faces of those he had wronged. A more miserable, disillusioned, abandoned-looking creature, seldom lay down to sleep; but before he arose, he knew that God knew where he was, and was his God. As in sleep he grew tranquil and still, and as the troubled, excited, flurried self he had brought with him from Beersheba, fell away from him, the Divine shone out softly and gloriously above and around him. The dream grew. The Fabric of the vision reared itself step by step. Wonder after wonder was unfolded. Behold the ladder! Behold the angels! And then, behold the Lord! and a voice came rolling down its steps—I am Jehovah, the God of Abraham thy father; I will be with thee in all places whither thou goest and

will never leave thee. What floods of joy must have been poured upon the outcast! That forsaken spot, that barren desolation has become the Gate of Heaven. The wilderness resounded with the grace of God, and overflowed with a Divine peace. And his own life lay before him, transfigured, filled with a Divine meaning, beckoning him onward with the angel hands of promise. And, Brethren, it is one of Christ's most exquisite interpretations of the Old Testament that He claims to be the fulfilment of the vision of Bethel. In Him men will see the heavens of God's love, and the angels of God's salvation ascending and descending upon the Son of Man. Jesus Christ is the true, the living ladder "set up on the earth," and the top of it reaching unto heaven.

I. "In the days of Jacob," says Hazlitt wistfully, "there was a ladder between Heaven and Earth; but now, the heavens are gone farther off, and have become astronomical." Let us rejoice that the very reverse of this is true; that through Christ we have a more direct access to God and heaven than if Jacob's ladder stood beside our pillow. Heaven has not gone further off; it has come a great deal nearer.

History suggests that America was known in Europe before the days of Columbus. But it was little more than a dream of the imagination, a

pretty myth for the poets, a fabled world somewhere in the midst of the sea. But after Columbus had told his story, the new world suddenly came a live and influential fact in the mind and life of the world. The famous explorer converted a dim speculation into one of the greatest factors in the thought, the commerce, and politics, —in the whole evolution and shaping of Europe. So, before Christ's advent, elect souls in some sense realized the spiritual sphere. They knew God. They saw the land that is very far off. But the vision was dim, and for the great multitude of men, it scarcely existed. But Christ has brought immortality to light. He has made the things that are unseen and eternal a master fact for mankind. "Thou shalt see the Heavens opened." "Yes," testifies St. Paul, "while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal." And Christ does this for us, because He Himself is the ladder, the Living Way, the Bridge, the [illegible] spiritual communication between Heaven and earth. Come, this Communion Sunday, and let us for a little, lie, like Jacob, at the foot of the heavenly ladder, and look upwards.

II. The ladder in Jacob's dream reached unto Heaven; yea, unto God. There was the Lord

God Himself looking down with compassion and forgiveness upon the remorseful, banished outcast; and Christ reacheth unto heaven, unto God Himself. Brethren, we know that. That is the keystone of our Christian faith. Take that out and it falls in ruins. We are sure of that as we are sure that right is right, and wrong is wrong. We are sure that the spiritual stature of Jesus Christ reacheth unto heaven, unto very God. If it were not so, our ladder were too short. If Christ were only the most inspired of prophets coming to us with a message about God, or the most glorious of martyrs, witnessing His faith by His blood, or the holiest of saints striving upward and onward, He might help to lift us higher than we are; He could not lift us up all the way to God. But, the ladder reacheth unto heaven. "I have no difficulty about the Divinity of Christ," said a well known theologian some time ago, "He is the God I love and adore. What I sometimes want to be assured of is, that a Deity like Him is in charge of this world." We, too, may sometimes feel a craving for assurance on that point. But we, too, have no difficulty about the Divinity of Christ. When He says, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father," our souls welcome the assurance and rejoice in it. If you ask us what the word Divine means, we say it means Christ-like. If you ask us what is the

spirit of the Divine, we say the spirit of Christ. If you ask us what the Divine life is, we say that life Christ lived. We *know* the *Divinity* of Christ, and that there is no other sort of Divinity to be thought of. We know that if we can climb this ladder, Christ, we shall get to God. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was *God*." The top of the ladder is fixed safely in Heaven. "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory." The foot of the ladder rests firmly upon the Earth. Yes! the ladder is long enough. It stretches all the way; and as you follow it upward, you see God looking upon you and speaking unto you, saying to you, "I am thy father's God—thy God."

III. For, if the top of the ladder reaches unto Heaven, the foot of it reaches unto the Earth. From Heaven to Earth! That is far enough for you and me. The ladder must come down into the pit and mire of sin before we can begin to climb. My Brethren, it is not astronomical distance that separates from God, but spiritual distance. There is nothing else that comes between us and God, but that. Oh! It is not that God is great, and I am small. That doth not separate. It is not that He is infinite, and I am a mere pin point as against a great continent. It is not that He lives forever, and my days are as an hand-

breadth. It is not His omniscience, and my weakness that separate me from God. No! No more than the feebleness and helplessness of your little child separates it from your heart. No! These things unite us to God, as your child's very weakness, his dependence on you endears him to you. So God's greatness and my littleness, His wisdom and my ignorance, His power and my weakness, these things are made for one another, and my very need draws God to me as God's fulness draws me to Him. But sin separates. Sin is the fatal schism. It is spiritual distance, and it is a distance we cannot measure. You cannot tell how far it is from the pure and peaceful gladness of the Father's House to the rebellion and sin of the far country. It is a distance we cannot measure, do I say? I am wrong. There is one thing that can measure it—only one—Love—Love with its sacrifice and its forgiveness. One thing only is longer, so to say, than the distance between sin and holiness—the length to which love can go in bearing wrong, and suffering for, and forgiving wrong. You cannot forgive your enemy,—no, nor your own child, except by a love that will stretch as far as the estrangement and farther. You cannot, and neither can God. There is one measure only, for the spiritual distance at which sin puts us from the holiness of God. It is the same distance as from the Throne

of the Father to the abyss out of which Jesus cried, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"—the same distance from the Throne of the Universe and the Grave in Joseph's garden. Brethren, the ladder is long enough. When the forgiving father and the humble prodigal meet in Christ, the tears and kisses of the one, fall upon the bowed head of the other. Distance is no more. The love of God has gone all the way. It has made our sins His Cross, our redemption His task. The heavenly ladder comes down to us wherever we are. It reached great and faithful Abraham in his day. It had to descend many steps lower to the crooked and unfaithful Jacob. And as I lay me with Jacob at its foot, I know that there is hope and healing for me and for all the children of men.

IV. And by this ladder the angels of God ascend and descend. Perhaps there are angels that carry our prayers and thanksgiving up to the Throne of Grace and that bring down from it the help and blessing we need. Perhaps it is an angel that sometimes whispers comfort to the troubled heart and strengthens the fainting spirit. Let us acknowledge that we know nothing about these couriers and ministers of mercy. We take them here as a symbol. They are God's messengers to you, and yours to Him. Your prayers, your aspirations, your faith, your hope,

your thanksgivings are your angels. First they come down to you through the gate of Heaven, and you send them back as your messenger to Heaven. And then another relay comes back, bringing all Divine blessing and help. Every truth revealed to your soul, every strength in time of need, consolation in every sorrow, sickness or duty, guidance in difficulty, guardianship in danger, are God's angels.

To-day, Brethren, God is in a special manner giving us Jacob's vision of the ladder which reaches unto heaven. Look up, and see God looking down upon you in His unchangeable love. Listen to the voice Divine that comes down clear and distinct, into your soul: "I will not leave thee until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of." Brethren, these are the very words of our Saviour to us in the Lord's supper. That is the very meaning of this Sacrament. It means that in these symbols of His body and Blood He pledges Himself to us anew. He vows a faithfulness which all our fickleness, a loyalty which all our inconstancy, a love which all our coldness has not changed and cannot change. He takes us up once more into the arms of His everlasting purpose. "Lo, I am with you always, and I will not leave thee until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of."

What has He spoken unto you? Tell me

what you speak unto Him and I will tell you what He speaks unto you. Do you say, "Wash me thoroughly from my iniquities and cleanse me from my sins"? Then He says, "Though your sins be as scarlet they shall be white as snow." Do you speak to Him of your soul's hunger and thirst? Then he says, "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness for they shall be filled." Or do you speak to Him of your burden of sorrow? He says, "I will not leave thee till your sorrow is turned into joy." Or, is it the difficulties of your lot, the burden and heat of your day, that you lay before Him? He says to you, "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. As thy days, so shall thy strength be." Is it of straitness in the things of this world, of daily bread, of health and strength, and the vicissitudes of your calling that you speak? He says, "The eyes of all wait upon Me, and I give them their meat in due season." Is it some cross of your soul, some evil habit that clings, or some blessing for yourself or your children you make mention of? He says again, "I will not leave thee till I have done it." To you young people, girding on your armour, facing life with its unforeseen tasks, temptations, and dangers, He says, "I will be with thee in all places whither thou goest." To you who are old and gray-headed, who have no long vista of years

stretching before you, He says, "I will not forsake thee." The outward man may decay but the inward shall be renewed from day to day. With good courage then may we say, "the Lord is my helper, I will not fear. I will not fear my path, for His goodness and mercy are my safeguards. They follow me all the way, blotting out my transgressions, correcting my failures and mistakes. I will not fear the lurking snares of to-day, for he will keep my feet. I will not fear the unknown experiences of to-morrow, for my times are in His hand. I will not fear life, for his grace is sufficient, nor death which He makes the Crown of Life to the faithful."

Speak to Him that He may speak to thee. so faint, as to escape His hearing. Yet, there is one more thing to be said. God sets Christ, the heavenly ladder, before us, that we may climb it. Milton, in Paradise Lost, tells how sin and death followed the track of Satan, and paved after him a broad and beaten way over the abyss, a bridge of wondrous length, stretching from Earth to *Hell*. That is true. But this also is true. Christ has ascended up on high and has left behind Him a way stretching from earth to heaven. It is the way He made for Himself through the jungles of temptation, the deserts of toil, and the dark valleys of humiliation. With agony and bloody sweat He made His way, left

it a made road, an explored and beaten track for us to walk in—a ladder for us to climb. Not an easy road even yet. Who is the man that shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? He that hath clean hands and a pure heart. And it is not an easy thing to keep clean hands in this world, much less easy to have a pure heart. But let us be climbing; let every communion season find us still climbing. As we take the pledges of our Saviour's loyalty to-day let us give Him ours. Let us begin anew to follow Him, and we shall ascend—our whole life will be an ascending—until at last we reach the hill of God, and stand within His holy place. Thus saith He, "I will not leave thee until I have done that which I have spokcn to thee of." Amen.

X.

CHRIST'S ABSENCE FROM THE BODY THE CONDITION OF HIS FULL SPIRITUAL PRESENCE

Touch Me not: for I am not yet ascended to My Father.—*John xx: 17.*

THESE are strange words on the lips of Jesus Christ. Never before, never afterwards did he use such words of repulsion or repression And strange, it was against Mary, most devoted of His followers, last at the Cross, first at the Tomb, that the barrier was erected.

Mary stood without at the Sepulchre weeping, and as she wept Jesus saith unto her, "Mary," one word only, but it was enough. It was the old voice with its familiar cadence. Mary had heard it too often to mistake it for another. Yet when Mary, lost in a tumult of delight was rushing forward to fling herself upon Him He arrests her in her transport—"Touch Me not." She was assuming that He had come back to the old scenes in the old manner, to resume the old mode of life with his followers, but our Lord announces that this had come to an end. This intercourse with His disciples through the senses, the audible word, the tone of voice, the

grasp of hand, and the expression of countenance, and all the visible, tangible symbols by which souls clothed in flesh and blood are drawn to one another was past and gone.

John, who had leaned on the Master's bosom, must learn now another and nobler way of resting on Him. Peter must learn another way of grasping his Master's upholding hand, than had saved him when sinking in the Galilean Lake. Mary had thought that the supreme object of her trust and devotion could be touched with a finger, clung to by clasping hands. She must learn to feel Him nearer and to cling to Him, not with the senses but with the soul.

Quite obviously, it seems to me, "Touch Me not, for I am not yet ascended," imply, "And when I am ascended you may touch. True contact with me is not that of flesh with flesh, which is past and gone with my dying; but it is that of spirit with spirit, and that cannot be fully realized until I ascend to the Father. Then you shall touch Me and cling to Me. You shall open your very mind, heart and soul to Me as never before, and I shall come back and make my abode there."

The truth then is that Christ's bodily absence is the condition of His full spiritual presence. There are facts of very familiar experience which, so far as they go, are in line with that

truth. Do we not often find as a matter of common experience that bodily separation often brings us spiritually nearer, causes what is most high-souled in our relations to each other, to become stronger and clearer than ever before? To what man is his native land, "the hills of home," so dear as to the exile? When is it the youth first values his home? Is it not when he first leaves it? And is it not the absent ones who come to occupy, for the first time perhaps, their true place in the thought and heart of the home? We have found that we never knew till that last evening, or that first letter, how close heart was to heart. While all are thought of, and loved, and prayed for, is it not the absent ones—the boys overseas, the dear ones far away, who obtain the first place? And we reach a still closer analogy in the experience of the great parting; for again, is it not most true that this only brings nearer in spirit those in whose hearts the truth of love has ever dwelt? Ah! We entertain our angels so often unawares. We live by their side day after day, year after year; but it needs that they take their flight to heaven before we see the gleam of celestial light on their wings. Then their excellences, their worth, their goodness shine out upon us, and stamp their image with a diviner impression upon the heart. How often is it so! Alas! Alas! When it is not so.

It is in the solemn hour of parting, that the most perfect union of soul with soul is realized, the everlasting meeting begins. And all these things were true in reference to our Lord. What Mary felt, and what we all sometimes feel, is expressed in the children's hymn,

> I think when I read that sweet story of old
> When Jesus was here among men,
> How He called little children as lambs to His fold,
> I should like to have been with Him then;
> I wish that His hands had been placed on m head,
> That His arms had been thrown around me,
> And that I might have seen His kind look when He said,
> Let the little ones come unto Me.

That is a very human feeling, but it does not exhaust the matter.

Jesus lived for thirty years among the townsmen of Nazareth, and not a glimmering of His greatness entered their minds. "Is not this the carpenter?" they said. It might be so still. Jesus Christ might be walking the streets of Toronto; He might be your next door neighbor, and you would never know it. It is only the risen and ascended Christ whom we can see in some small measure—see as He is, whom our souls can truly touch.

All that is true; yet all merely human analogies fail to furnish an adequate parallel to the Communion between the ascended Christ and us who are here on earth. You recall His

own words: "It is expedient for you that I go away, for if I go not away the Comforter will not come unto you, but if I depart I will send Him unto you." In other words, Christ ascended—went away, only to come again in a greater way, no longer as a bodily presence, limited and local, but as a universal, spiritual presence and power. It was not possible that He should be both at the same time; and He went away in the bodily form, that He might come and abide with us in the spiritual way. And I want you to consider how it is that this makes Christ the Saviour we need.

Consider, then, that Christ's bodily presence was subject to the ordinary limitations of space. He could not, any more than you or I, be in more than one place at one time. One suppliant only, or a group of suppliants, could touch Him on any one occasion.

One day when Christ was at Perea a message came to Him that his friend Lazarus was sick. Now, Jesus loved Mary and Martha and their brother Lazarus. But He was several days' journey from Bethany, and perhaps there were sick bodies to be healed and sick souls to be saved where He was. At any rate, He was so situated that He could not immediately fly to the help of His afflicted friends in Bethany. But now that He is ascended there is no sum-

mons of need He cannot answer, how and when He wills. Now, we can touch Him whenever two or three are gathered together in His House. He is in the midst. Now, He can be with each of His friends at any, and at all times. With every John in his Patmos, with every Peter in his cell, with every penitent, crying, "God be merciful to me a sinner," with every soul in distress, every moan of weeping, every tempted one, every fallen one, every follower bearing His Cross, every soldier fighting His battle, every servant doing His work—there Christ is, watching, guarding, pardoning, healing, teaching, guiding, comforting, strengthening. Consider, I say, this wondrous thing, that Christ went away from our bodily touch, that our souls might always touch Him. He went away to Heaven, only that on earth He might be with us always. He is there; He is here—there preparing a place for us; here preparing us for the place. There in the noon-day; here in the twilight. There amid the palms of victory; here amid the heart of the battle. He ascended up on high that He might fulfill all things.

And it is not only, so to say, the extent of Christ's presence that is freed from all bodily limitations; it is rendered altogether more vital and intimate. We may sometimes envy the privilege of a Mary sitting at His feet looking

up into His face, John leaning on His breast, or the woman of Samaria listening to His discourse, and, no doubt, that manner of touching Him had its own peculiar preciousness. To lose it, was to lose much; but it was to lose much, only to gain more. Brethren, there is a far richer privilege granted to us—did we but know it—to have Christ dwelling in our hearts by faith. To them in the days of the flesh, it was not an indwelling, but an outdwelling Christ. He was the dear, revered teacher. Nevertheless, His voice was still an external voice, speaking to them from without, not from within their own minds. And, had He continued to live in the flesh, His kingdom in this world must have taken the form of a kind of glorified Papacy. Wherever controversy arose upon any point of doctrine or duty, when any perplexity or social problem pressed for solution, instead of earnestly endeavouring to think it out, we should hurry off with it to the Master, to have it settled for us by His authoritative pronouncement. But Christ will not be a Pope. He will not let us touch Him in that way. He does a far greater thing. To all those who love the truth, He gives the Spirit of Truth, to quicken them, not, observe, to *give* them all truth, but to *guide* them into all truth. That is true education; not to give the pupil the true answer to all

his problems, but to guide his thinking and enable him to find it for himself. And, Brethren, whatever perplexities you may have about religious truth, or about your own duty, or about the way in which God is leading you, if you really want the truth, want to know it that you may do it, rely upon the unseen Christ, the Spirit of Truth within you. He will guide you unto the fruitful and practical possession, as a lamp for the feet and a light for the path, of all you need to know for doing God's will on earth.

Then, lastly, the departure of Christ in bodily presence meant the substitution of an inward life-giving spirit, an indwelling purity, for the mere influence of an outward example. God forbid that I should ever appear to place a secondary value upon the example which our Blessed Lord has left us that we should follow in his steps! Never was there created in the imagination of man, never but once witnessed on earth so heavenly a vision, Christ's example is the world's one standard of perfect goodness. The only perfect morality is to love and follow Him. Yet if we had it always before our eyes, would that help us truly to follow it? Would it not tend rather to slavish external imitations? Christ will not have us touch Him in that way, but in a more real way. He would not have us

be as the mere copyist, mechanically reproducing the work of another, but rather as the artist inspired and guided, it is true, by another's work, but going on to fashion his own forms of beauty, and to express his own conceptions.

After all, Brethren, it is more than an example that we need. Spiritually, man is a poor cripple; and to hold up to him example and nothing more, is as if one were to step very nimbly and gracefully before a cripple and say, Take a lesson from me in the art of walking. Brethren, Christ's example is our one royal law. But what power shall take that Law and make it *Life,* write it on our hearts, inspire it into our affections, conform our dispositions and requirements, so that knowledge will pass into love, and duty into choice? There is one power only that can do this for us and all men—the Spirit of Christ—the Spirit which made Christ Himself what He was, Who dwelt in Him, and made it His gladness and delight—His meat and drink, to do His Father's will. And this divinest gift, which is our supreme need, He gives to all who touch Him soul to soul. And of all this, He gives us assurance in the sacrament of the Supper. That Sacrament is a sign and pledge to us of His presence with His Church and in it—with every believing soul. Though it is a different kind of presence from what it

was, .. is not less but more real, not less but more near and immediate. There is no near and far in the spiritual world. Nearness here means likeness. Kindred spirits are always near,, however separated by space or time; and spirits that have nothing in common are wide as the poles asunder, though they dwell under the same roof. We come close to Christ when we are lifted up in heart and mind to Him. And if we have the Mind of Christ, we are with Him—nay, He is in us and we in Him. And now He does not say, Touch Me not. He says, I am ascended so that I am with you, therefore touch Me. May He Himself help us to touch Him and cling to Him with our whole heart and soul, with all our need of purity, and peace, and truth, and courage, that so touching Him, we may gain that power by which alone we are able to do and to endure.

XI.

MORAL WEAKNESS CONFRONTED WITH THE FORCE OF CIRCUMSTANCES

When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing but that rather a tumult was made, he took water and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, "I am innocent of the blood of this just person; see ye to it."—*Matthew xxxii: 24.*

HOW long has Pilate stood there washing his hands, which are yet never clean? Will he never come down from that pillory, and see that stain removed? No; never while the world standeth. Yet Pilate was not, all things considered, an exceptionally bad man. "When his position is understood," says an excellent Life of Christ, "it appears that he was, to a large extent, the victim of circumstances." The victim of circumstances—that is the keynote of what I want to say this evening. Was Pilate compelled to be—there is no doubt he was—but was he *compelled* to be, and is anybody foredoomed and compelled to be the victim of circumstances?

And first, we must look at the circumstances. Pontius Pilate was the Roman Governor of Judea. The work of governing that most turbu-

lent and intractable province was as difficult a business as, say, the governing of Ireland to-day. And Pilate was ill-adapted to it. He wanted to play the part of the strong man, the man of imperious temper who carries things with a high hand. But his Jewish subjects soon discovered that he was not equal to his part. His predecessors in office had been prudent enough to respect the religious scruples of the Jews, and when their troops marched through the streets of Jerusalem, announced that they should not carry their standards emblazoned with the image of the Emperor. But Pilate, disdaining this concession, bade his cohorts march in with all their insignia, and plant them on the Citadel. The indignant Jews thronged to the Palace, and clamoured for the removal of the offensive images. For five days they continued their importunity, until Pilate surrounded them with troops and threatened them with instant death unless they desisted. To his amazement and discomfiture, they flung themselves on their faces and, baring their necks, declared themselves ready to die rather than endure the violation of their laws. Pilate gave way, and his compliance was fatal to his authority ever afterwards. The Jews had taken his measure, so Pilate went on in his unfortunate regime, alternately exasperating the Jews and yielding to

them. And then, on the other hand, there was Pilate's master, the old Emperor Tiberius, a morose, jealous tyrant, one who seemed to take a delight in humiliating his lieutenants, who greedily drank in any complaint against them, and from whom Pilate knew an unsuccessful governor would receive short shrift. And Pilate had been already complained of and reprimanded. Between the Jews on the one hand, and the Emperor on the other, he was between the upper and the nether mill-stone. All this is to be remembered. It gives us the key to the tragedy which enacted itself in Pilate's soul on that fateful day when Jesus Christ was brought as a prisoner before him. For what is most conspicuous in all his proceedings is his strange, almost passionate desire to escape responsibility —to stand outside this matter of Jesus Christ and his trial altogether. And we see how the net is drawn closer and closer around him, till no loophole of escape is left, and he is compelled at last to take action, and even then disclaiming responsibility for the action he takes, washing his hands of it, and protesting that he is the victim of circumstances.

So Pilate sees at the first glance what his duty is. "I find in Him no fault at all." Here there should have been an end of the matter. The judge had pronounced his verdict "not

guilty." What remained—but to release the prisoner and grant Him the protection of the court against all lawless attack? But no. As Pilate looks down on that sea of stony faces his resolution fails. He acquits the prisoner, then parleys with the accusers, remonstrates, dissuades, tries in every way to wriggle out of responsibility. Learning that Jesus is a Galilean, therefore a subject of Herod, he conceives the happy thought of sending the prisoner to him for judgment. But Herod, more buffoon than King, thinks it excellent policy to return the so-called King of the Jews upon Pilate's hands, clothed in a caricature of regal attire, a crown of thorns upon His head. Then the mob comes shouting up to the palace gate demanding their annual gift of a released prisoner. To-day their demand is music in Pilate's ears. He offers them Jesus. But once again his weak expedient breaks in his hands. "Not this man but Barabbas," they cry. Then, like other weak men in a strait, Pilate proposes a middle course. He will have Jesus scourged to satisfy their malice; then release Him to satisfy his own conscience. But in vain. With all his resourcefulness and ingenuity, and with all his good wishes and intentions too, the chain of circumstances was closing around Pontius Pilate. The last rivet was fastened, when now the Jews brought out

the weapon they had been keeping in reserve, the one Pilate had been in mortal terror of all the time. They hold the terror of Tiberius over him. "If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar's friend." To do his duty, Pilate had been willing to risk something—but not this. "If thou let this man go, thou are not Caesar's friend." That was enough. Pilate succumbed; yet not without one more weak, unavailing protest. Calling for a basin of water he solemnly washed his hands of the blood of this just person.

Now the story of Pilate's shipwreck touches us very closely. It is the common, everyday tragedy of human life—the tragedy of moral weakness in its unsuccessful struggle with the force of circumstances. It excites in us contending feelings as we read it. One moment we find no blame too severe; and then, as one's point of view changes, we feel nothing but pity. Another moment, when compassion for the unfortunate victim of circumstances holds the field, we are again thrown back upon the fact that he, and he alone, was to blame, that nothing absolves him from responsibility for what he did. It shows us how complex a thing human life is, how impossible it is for us to adjust the balance of judgment between the opposing weight of circumstances on the one hand, and of responsi-

bility on the other. It says to us, "Judge not that ye be not judged." It awakens a prayer, "Lead us not into temptation." Still, let us try to learn some plain lessons from it.

It is the common, everyday tragedy of human life because we see in it a man handicapped by his own past. All the circumstances which made it so terribly hard for Pilate to save his soul that day, were of his own making. Had it not been for the fear of having all the incidents of his past misgovernment raked up, Pilate would quickly have marched his troops across the square, and cleared it of the mob and defied the Sanhedrin. But Pilate had given hostages to the enemy. His hands were tied. And, in the same way, many a man is in the position of paying moral blackmail for something in his past. I am not thinking of anything specially criminal. I mean that often men form habits and associations which present a very formidable hindrance when they would fain begin to live a better life. There are many people who know absolutely, that they ought to be Christians, that Christ's side is the right side in the battle of life, and that they ought to be His servants, soldiers and followers. They cannot help knowing it and admitting it. But they have not begun to live this better life because of certain self-made difficulties standing in the way. How are they

to face the sacrifices of these questionable indulgences? How are they to abandon those pleasant, but not very pure, or inspiring associations which have grown to be part of their lives? There are many people who, if they could begin again, would take a different path, or at least they think so. They would choose the better part, and walk in the high and noble way. But they have committed themselves to the other side. They have given all who know them to understand that they are not religious men. They have talked about sacred things carelessly, perhaps contemptuously. They have made a reputation of that sort. They have beset themselves with a score of entanglements; and all their past now stands in their way. The way of transgressors is hard—so it is said. But it is not hard in itself. It is easy; for it follows the line of least resistance. It is only when one wants to retrace it, that it becomes hard. And then, it is hard indeed. It was so for Pilate. When we read the story of that prolonged duel between his better self and his temptations, we see him like a mountain climber who has lost his footing in some deadly slope, wildly clutching at whatever projecting stone, or shrub, or tuft of grass, might arrest his downward course; but the slope is too steep, the mountain is too great, and he is dragged on as if by some irresistible hand to

the edge of the abyss. And yet, that comparison is essentially defective. There is no moral drift which may not be arrested. No man is bound by his past. Even Pilate *could* have saved himself. We can picture Pilate as a conqueror. That is what makes the terrible, tragic interest of his story. Were we reading it for the first time we should follow it step by step with intense eagerness, always hoping that at the last he will show himself a true man, and break through all entanglements. It was for Pilate to determine whether he would be chained to his past or pay the price of freedom. There is always a price to pay. By paying that price you can be free.

But here is the second thing about Pilate. He was foredoomed to failure from the first, only because there was in the background of his mind the knowledge that there was a certain price—a price he had determined not to pay. He knew what was his duty, and earnestly desired to do it. If he might obey his conscience, hazarding Caesar's displeasure, he would rejoice. If he could evade the issue and shuffle off upon others the unwelcome responsibility that was thrust upon him, he would be content. But if there were no way of escape, if that choice was forced upon him, Pilate secretly knew on which side his decision would fall. His whole

attitude throughout that day is that of a man saying, "I am very sorry; I hate to do this; but you see, I cannot help myself." Brethren, nothing is more common than this. It is the plea for nine-tenths of the wrong-doing in the world—that men are driven to it. So the Kaiser tells the world, and possibly his own conscience —that he was driven to make the war—driven to violate the neutrality of Belgium, driven to the countless atrocities that blacken his name. So other men tell us that they are driven to drink, driven to dishonesty, driven to crime. Strange —is it not? that people should be so easily driven in these directions, and so unsusceptible to driving in others! It is easy to drive some men to the tavern, whom it would take a mighty power to drive to the church. And those who are driven to dishonest ways of making a livelihood—how hard it would be to drive them to honest labour! Men are not so easily driven. They go very slowly indeed in any direction which they heartily dislike. But Pilate stands on a different level. His case does seriously raise the question—Can man ever be the helpless victim of circumstances? Brethren, it is a serious question. It is easy to say no; but it is not a question to be lightly answered. It was a great thing, a tremendous thing, that was demanded of Pilate —to risk the displeasure of that jealous, vindic-

tive tyrant [illegible] The loss of place, of power, emolume[illegible]ty or even life, and all for th[illegible] n obscure, friendless Jew. W[illegible] his possibl[illegible] Pilate said, "No. Necessity [illegible]e. I must safeguard myself." Bu[illegible]ossible? What answer is given by [illegible]o stands before Pilate's judgment seat? What said He? He, too, said, "Necessity is laid upon me." He, too, said, "I must do the will of Him that sent Me. I must drink the cup He giveth." Pilate's *must* and Christ's *must.* Brethren, that is the ultimate choice. Which is the true one? The whole width of the moral universe lies between them. The one is the soul's prisonhouse. All those pseudo-necessities, all those false *musts*—must live, must do, as others do, must defer to public opinion, are the soul's fetters. But Christ's *must!* That is the key which unlocks every prison door, breaks every shackle of the soul. Circumstances have no force at all against that *must* of Jesus Christ. Let a man, in whatever circumstances he find himself, only try Christ's key—the one simple necessity of doing the will of God, and the prison doors fly open. It may be to take but one step, to speak but a single word, and in a moment the tyranny of circumstances is broken, the encircling chain is snapped, the spellbound soul is free.

But there was another element that contributed to Pilate's downfall—the idea he clung to of escaping personal responsibility—that he could do in reality what he did in pantomine—wash his own hands of it, and say to the instigators of his guilt, "See ye to it." Again, a common and most mischievous idea. Association has a wonderful power to lull the conscience to sleep. In business a firm will frequently do what its individual partners would scorn to do: syndicates and companies, what many of their shareholders would not stoop to do in their private capacity: political parties which no honourable man in that party would do. Corporations and communities permit wrongs which no right-minded citizen approves. This is one of the great evils of our time in our land, and all over the world. My Brethren God does not recognize the principle of limited liability. It does not hold in the moral world. Ah! Do not say that it is the other partner in the firm who does the shady things. Do not charge your delinquencies upon your neighbour or your fellow-tradesmen, or the customs of society, or the tendency of the times. God will send the bill to you. You cannot wash your hands. No man will be your scapegoat at the last. You may join in the crowd; but the crowd will have vanished, and you will find yourself all alone at the Judgment Seat.

Responsibility, responsibility—that is the great word which Pilate's pathetic story leaves upon our minds. And it is a word that has eyes that look in every direction. Pilate would wash his hands of the crucifixion of Christ. He would ascribe it to the tigerish ferocity of these Jews. But it is in other ways that we are most apt to wash our hands of responsibility.

Pythagoras was once asked what his business was in the world. He replied, that at the Olympic games some people came to try for the prizes, some to dispose of their merchandise, some to meet their friends and enjoy themselves, and some only to look on. And said Pythagoras, "I am one of those who come to look on at life." That may be the philosopher's business. It is not the Christian's. We are here not to look on at life, but to take our place in it. We cannot wash our hands of things as we would often like to do. We cannot hide our face from our country in the time of its need. We cannot disregard the call to Christian service in the Church and in the State. We cannot resign, and withdraw from service, if things do not go as we want. We really cannot do that without leaving the spirit of Christ behind us. For Christ never washes His hands of men. It is wonderful. He never washes His hands of responsibility for you and me. He is no looker-

on at the tragedies and comedies of our existence. He does not hold aloof. He has made Himself responsible for us. He identifies Himself with us. He bears our sins. He enters into the heart of all our struggles. Let not the mind of Pontius Pilate, but the mind which was in Christ Jesus, be also in us.

XII.

THE HOPE OF IMMORTALITY

SOME time ago, in the days before the war, a German theologian prophesied that the hope of immortality would count for less and less in our religion, and would ultimately disappear. And it must be admitted that this forecast seemed to be in accord with the general trend of thought and interest. It is true that no ground of reason on which men have been wont to base this hope has been rendered untenable, and that no new fact has been discovered that discredits it; the contrary, as will presently be shown, is the case. It is true also, that the results of the most recent scholarly study of the Scriptures point entirely in the opposite direction. Especially is it the case that a more searching and realistic investigation of the Gospels than they had been before subjected to, shows that the eschatological element in the Life and Teaching of Jesus is not anything secondary, but is fundamental and pervasive to an extent which had not been apprehended. So much so, that a veteran and prince among New Testament scholars, Dr. Sanday, is found acknow-

Issued by the Assembly's Commission on the War.

ledging that he had not "until lately adequately realized how far the centre of gravity of our Lord's ministry and mission lay beyond the grave." Whether the results of this closer historical interpretation will in course of time filter down into popular thought, and if they do, in what form and with what effect, remains a question. Meantime it is beyond question that for at least a generation the hope of immortality has been counting for less and less in our religious life. The majority of people, no doubt, retain the traditional belief in a future state of existence; but it does not grip, it scarcely interests them; at most it ministers a vague consolation in time of bereavement. And the same thing has come to be true of those for whom religion is more vital, and of the Church as a whole. Before the outbreak of the war, sermons whose keynote was the life everlasting were comparatively seldom heard from our pulpits, and there was no more neglected section of the hymn book than that on the Last Things.

Nor is it difficult to account for this. A prolonged period of peace and prosperity, when progress in every department of activity seems to be constant and almost automatic, and the near horizon is bright with dazzling possibilities, is not one in which the vision of eternity is apt to grow most vivid. "Soul, thou hast much

goods laid up for many years" tends to become the utterance, not of a besotted individual, but of the collective mind. Another and more creditable cause is the new emphasis which in this generation is laid upon the social aspects and applications of Christianity. Human progress never succeeds in keeping to the *via media;* its advance is always by zigzags. We seem incapable of doing justice to one interest without doing injustice to another. So it is now. There was a time when the conception of the Christian salvation was far too exclusively that of dying in the peace of believing and going to Heaven. But we have changed all that. Social reform rather than the "salvation of souls" is our watchword; and the most earnest religion we have is more intent on getting things put right here and now than on any future Kingdom of Heaven. And how much, how very much, there is that is wholesome, how much to be thankful for, in this reaction from an excessive individualism and other-worldliness!

Yet, if we will listen to the teaching of history we shall be aware of the peril that attends all such reactions. We shall learn that in the Body of Truth no member can suffer neglect without injury to the rest; and shall take warning that we can never remedy one defect by creating another. And the question this paper

is intended in the first place to raise is, whether apart from the conviction of personal immortality—if we believe that this present state of existence contains all there is, *not only for ourselves but for all men*—it is possible to possess any ideal for the individual life, or any hope for human society, that can be called stimulating and satisfying.

We ungrudgingly admit—or, rather, gladly assert—that there are men who with no hope beyond the grave live noble, self-denying lives, who show an enthusiastic interest in all that concerns the welfare of their fellow-men, who are willing to spend and be spent, to labor and suffer, and even die, (as many have done in the present war) merely that those who come after them may find the world a better place. Nor is it to be thought that any of us must live ignobly, although we believed that life would end next week. Right is always right, and wrong unalterably wrong; and in that faith, even if all things human end in death, we should have to live as best we might. But that "best" would not be well. For we are saved by hope. We are so made that we cannot act in the present and for the present only. To say that we are rational beings means that we act with an outlook upon some future near or far. We sow in hope that we shall reap, or that others will reap. The per-

manence of any fact, either in itself or in its consequences, is as essential factor of value; and while moral ideals have an absolute value—the value of right depending on nothing else than its rightness—yet an ideal to be a fact at all, must have *being*. And the ideal has being only in minds; and if all the minds whose ideal it is cease to exist, not only its existence but every trace and memory of its existence must be obliterated. We may say that to do right is at any rate eternally right; that, whatever happens, it will always be a fact that we made the right choice, and that this fact will enter somehow as a component into the general sum of human things; but if that general sum is finally nothing, what value remains to its components? We may say that the past is never dead but lives still in the present and will live on in the future; but if a time shall come when for humanity there is no present and no future, but only a past that is absolutely gone, which there is nothing to recall and no one to remember, can it be said that anything done in it is a fact of imperishable value? It must be admitted at any rate that it makes practically a vast difference whether one is convinced that the right choice he makes, it may be in the face of sore temptation, is destined to bear permanent fruit in his own and in other lives, or that all fidelity,

all striving after purity and goodness, will in the end leave no trace anywhere. The truth is that we are saved by hope; that all men who live nobly and fight the good fight do so because they believe that their action will bear fruit in some future far or near. They have thought out matters so far, and it is only so long as we do not think them out to the end that we can ignore the hope of personal immortality.

For what is the substitute which a popular school of modern thought offers for this? It is the contribution each of us can make to the future progress of the race, that we may live on in other lives made better by the fact that we have lived. If we must feed our minds on a future, it is far better to set our hearts on doing what we can in our brief day to make life better for those who are to come after us, than to hanker after the continuance of our own petty personal existence. We ought to remember, as it is often said, that though God buries the workman, He carries on the work, and that it is the work, not the tools, that is the important thing. But this is merely to evade the ultimate issue. One would like to know how God is going to carry on the work when He has buried all the workmen; and, moreover, what the "work" is He is going to carry on (believing with St. Paul that "we are His workmanship").

Those who rest in this position assume the immortality of man, though not of men. They contemplate the permanence of the human race. But how, one would again like to know, without individual immortality can there be an immortality of the race? Modern science dispels any such dream. "Till a period within the memory of men now living it was possible to credit terrestrial life with an infinite future, wherein there was room for an infinite approach to an unpictured perfection. It could always be hoped that human efforts would leave behind them some enduring traces which, however slowly, might accumulate without end. But hopes like these are possible no more. All terrestrial life is in revolt against the second law of thermodynamics (the degradation of energy); but, to it, in the end, must all terrestrial life succumb." (A. J. Balfour, *Theism and Humanism,* pp. 90-92.) If the physical history of this planet is allowed to run out its natural course, there will one day be a last man; and if there is no life beyond, with his expiring breath humanity will be extinct, all its history of mingled good and evil, its sins and heroisms, its aspirations and struggles, have gone down into the grave of everlasting nonentity. It seems a fine thing to say: What matters if I pass? let me think of others. But these other lives

have become petty and insignificant as your own. Try as you will to obtain firm footing, all is sinking sand. Human griefs and human happiness, human right and human wrong, all are ephemeral as the itching of your eyebrow. There is no escape from the ultimate issue. If the life of the individual is only "a momentary taste of being, from the well amid the waste," then all human history is but the "phantom caravan" which at last reaches "the nothing it set out from." In Plato's phrase, all things are spent on death. Could any creed be more paralyzing, if its implications were realized? It is because they do not think matters out to the end that those who deny the hope of immortality, can endure the denial.*

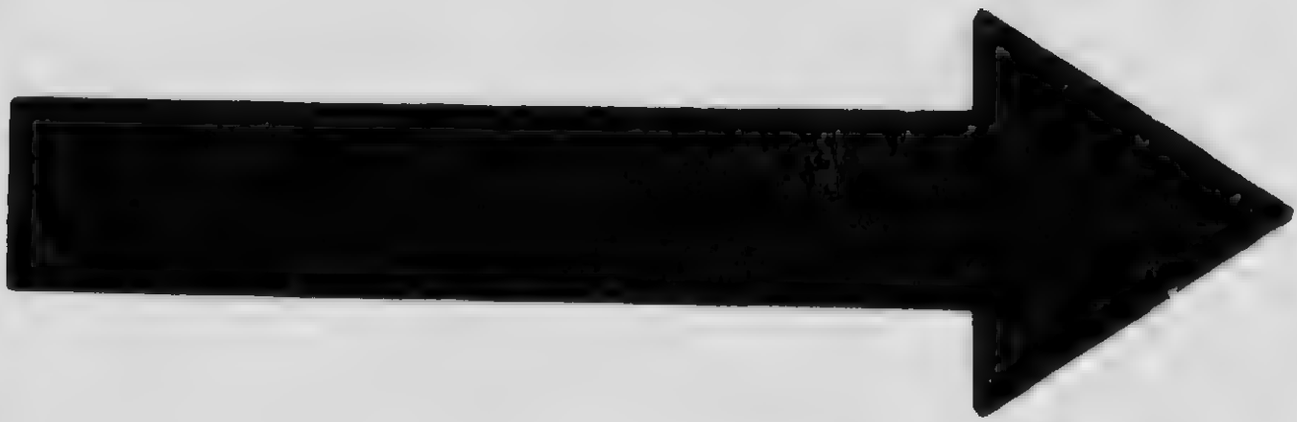
But the tragic events of the times in which we live are compelling us so to think, and to-day the Hope of the Gospel is nearer and dearer to multitudes than ever before. Not that the war with its colossal sacrifice of human personality in any way strengthens the case for immortality; but it brings the alternative home to us with a poignant intensity. When men, obeying the call of duty, are cut down in thick swaths long

*There are exceptions to this statement, but they are of such a kind as only to emphasize its general truth. One who has honestly faced the final issue writes: "Only on the firm foundation of unyielding despair can the soul's habitation hereafter be built." (Hon. Bertrand Russell, *Philosophical Essays*, p. 60.)

ere the scythe of time had any claim upon them, their powers still in the green blade, their dreams and ambitions unrealized, their work apparently undone, if this were the end, then what is man? His beauty is consumed like the moth; his days are like unto vanity. We feel the tragic incompleteness of these young lives; and then we feel the incompleteness of all human life, feel that it cannot be a circle closing us in, it must be a path leading elsewhere. It is so manifestly a fragment, a beginning, a sowing-time of which the full harvest must be hereafter.

To reach an assurance so greatly to be desired men have followed various paths. There is the path of spiritualism, of actual communications from the departed, demonstrating to the senses the fact of their survival beyond death. But without affirming or denying or committing oneself to any opinion about the reality of such manifestations, one may express the conviction that, while they may in certain cases confirm belief in personal immortality, they can never originate it. It is safe to assert that no one has ever come really to believe in a future life because he has seen a ghost or heard mysterious table-rappings. It is the belief that makes these communications from the unseen credible, if they are credible, not *vice versa*.

There is the path of philosophical specula-



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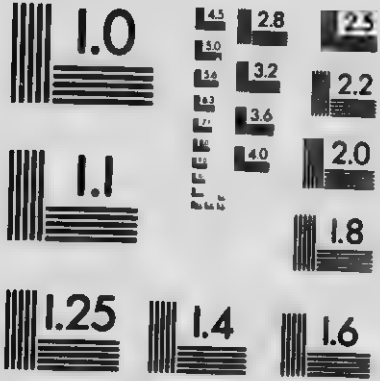

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tion, the path of Plato and his successors, who have reasoned, and perhaps reasoned well, that the soul is by its very nature indestructible. But the metaphysical proof will never lead, will never at any rate lead the ordinary man very far.

We get further, perhaps, by the path of simple instinct. There is something in most of us that naturally revolts against the "cold obstruction of the tomb." Even a seasoned agnostic like Huxley acknowledges, "I do not relish the thought that in 1900 I shall have ceased to be, as completely as in 1800 I had not begun to be." But the instinct is not universal; and in many of those who do possess it, its potency is strangely variable. Nor does it always point forward to a personal immortality; with a large section of the human race it takes the form of a longing for absorption, the merging of all self-identity, in the unconscious depths of Eternal Being. But granting the existence and power of the instinct, the question arises whether it is to be trusted; and that is part of a larger question. Is life on a rational basis? Does the Power that has made us what we are, whatever that Power is, mean something by it, and is it to be trusted to finish what is has begun? Is there in human life and history a purpose that is marching on, and is that purpose wise and righteous and good? Can we be assured that

whatever would be most blessed and good, were it true, must therefore ultimately be true? These questions resolve themselves into one question—Is there a God? Ordering and pervading all things, is there the will of a rational, righteous and loving God?

Wherever the most vivid, operative, fruitful faith in personal immortality has been reached, it has been reached by the path of religious faith and held with the certainty of religious experience. The most striking illustration of this fact, that faith in God, a God who is almighty and good, holds within it the assurance of immortality (even if only in the germ), is found in the religion of the Old Testament. The gropings and strugglings by which Hebrew faith advanced from the dreary belief in the ghost-life of Sheol to the exultant certainty, "He shall swallow up Death in victory" is the most impressive picture in the spiritual history of mankind of the necessity the human soul is under, in its highest and best moments, to believe that the present world does not furnish a satisfying ideal of human life, nor fulfil the purpose of one who can be fully trusted and adored as God. At first Israel had scarcely any ideas about the future, and those it had it shrank from in horror. But Israel had God, and that was everything. Its faith in God

was greater and richer than it knew (as ours, too, may be greater and richer than we know), and among its stored-up treasures, which it needed centuries of the teaching of experience and the guidance of the Spirit to bring forth, was the hope of immortality. "Like Bunyan's pilgrim, the faith of Israel unconsciously carried the key of Promise in its bosom even when it was in the dungeons of Giant Despair."

And so it is still. If the great hope is to be more than a theological dictum or a comatose religious tradition, if it is to be a truth that is quick and powerful, touching experience at many vital points, influencing the whole outlook upon life, not an unrealized asset but a true soul-possession, it is still along this same path of faith and experience that it must be won. The hope of personal immortality stands or falls with faith in a personal God, and the realization of what that implies.

To believe in God is to believe in the *rationality* of things. And, let it be said once more, if life leads only to death, and the whole stream of human history, carrying in it the life-blood of all the generations, vanishes at last in the abyss of final nothingness, it is most like an idiot's tale, "full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." But this pessimistic conclusion we cannot seriously entertain. We cannot soberly

believe that we ourselves are a product of irrationality, and that this world in which we live is the result of accident. There is too much good in it for that, too much wisdom, beauty and goodness, too much happiness and love. But if we are sure that this is God's world, that it has emanated from a Being who is wise, and just and good, we must be equally sure that it is not God's best world—there is too much evil in it for that, too much that is imperfect, discordant, disappointing.

When we contemplate our own nature we find that we are made with capacities to which the present life never has been and never can be adequate. Such is our capacity for *happiness*. To the most fortunate in circumstances, to the most fervent in piety, there come dreams of a happiness beyond anything that has been or ever will be experienced in this life. There is in us a capacity for *truth* which points beyond the limits of our present state. The quest for truth has been laid upon us, we know not how; and the further we advance in this quest the further off does the goal appear. Those who know most know best th ere they have but touched the fringes of kno dge; and there is in us all an instinct which rises up to welcome the assurance that many things we know not now, we shall know hereafter. Deeper still, there is in us

an inextinguishable capacity for *goodness.* If we know that we are capable of being far happier and wiser, we are still more conscious that we are capable of being far better than we are or are ever likely to be in this life; for, again, it is those who have advanced furthest in the pursuit of goodness who also see the greatest distances still to be traversed, and to the very end are forgetting the things behind and reaching forth to those that are before. There is in us a capacity for *service* which this life never exhausts; "The petty done, the undone vast," is still the cry of our struggling, aspiring humanity; and it is not easily conceivable that the vast powers for service personalized in a Paul, a Luther or a Lincoln are forever dissipated because a heart ceases to beat. There is a content in such personalities that is never fully expressed in their work. If life is on a rational basis the words, "Faithful in a few things," demand the sequel, "be thou lord over many things." And *love* stretches out both hands across the gulf of death. If revolts against the suggestion that all we have learned and suffered and meant for others, and all that others have learned and suffered and meant for us, is suddenly to be ended by the guillotine of death. To know that every hour that binds us more closely to each other, that makes us more fit to love and

be loved, is only a step towards love's extinction, would rob us of any belief that the scheme of things in which our lives are set is to be trusted. To suppose that we are endowed with such capacities for happiness, for goodness and knowledge and service and love, and that when these capacities have been partially developed and we have learned a little how to live and have acquired some fitness for a place in God's universe—to suppose that just then we die and there is an end of us, is to suppose that God, if there is a God, takes the rough ore out of the mine, smelts it and changes it into fine steel, forges it into weapons for His use, tempers and polishes them, and then one day, in His caprice, breaks them in pieces and scatters their fragments to the void. "What profit is there in my blood, when I go down to the pit?" The Psalmist's question goes to the root of the matter. To believe in God is to trust the rationality of life, and to trust the rationality of life is to believe in the life to come. When the death of a British officer, killed in action, was announced to a brother-officer who had been long his friend: "—— dead!" he exclaimed. "It'll take more than that to stop him. He'll carry on." It will take more than that to stop the career of any faithful life. We shall have the "glory of going on."

And to believe in God is to believe that

there is an ultimate righteousness in things, that there is a moral order, a conscience in the universe, which distinguishes between right and wrong, and reacts upon the right-doer and the wrong-doer, according to their character. It is said by critics of the doctrine of personal immortality that the important thing is, not that we should survive, but that the things we care for shall survive, that these are valued in the universe on the whole as they are by us. But one of the things we thus care for is justice. A universe without justice would be an irrational universe; a radically unjust universe would be an infinite crime. We have a deep conviction that the ground-law of the universe *ought to be* such as will vindicate the right and everyone who is faithful to it; and by equal necessity redress the wrong and meet the arrogant and impenitent wrongdoer with the full force of its antagonism. But certainly this conviction is never fully justified in the present world. If it is true, as doubtless it is, that "history has a nemesis for every crime," in probably a majority of cases, it is not upon the perpetrator of the crime that its nemesis falls. If it is true that "the history of the world is the judgment of the world," it is a text on which it is often possible to preach that "might is right" as plausibly as that "right is might." The

moral order demands another stage than that of this world for its full development. If Christ and Herod, Paul and Nero; if the criminals who have brought this cataclysm of war upon the world—if they and their helpless victims and their heroic resisters drop through the trap-door of death into the same unawakening sleep, if any man can shuffle out of the consequences of his deeds simply by dying, as all men must, existence is built on no principle of righteousness. The sufferings of innocence, the frequent impunity of wrong, callous selfishness flourishing, love trampled upon and crucified—Dives eating the fat and drinking the sweet, Lazarus rotting at his gate—these are facts of this life, and if the Power who conducts the world is to be called righteous, there must be other facts beyond. The criticism, that this belief in the ultimate righteousness of things means on the one hand a desire to be paid for doing our duty, and on the other hand a thirst for vengeance, is merely unintelligent. To say that men are responsible, if it means anything, means that they must somehow, somewhere, somewhen respond. There must come a time when in the light of truth the hidden shall be made open, and the open revealed in its true colors, and all falsehood and self-deception wither away. This is as necessary for the wrong-doer as for the

righteous; and without it life would, morally, lead to no conclusion at all.

But for those who accept the revelation of God in Christ, there is yet firmer ground. To believe in God is to believe not only in rationality and righteousness, it is to believe in a perfect and eternal Love at the heart of life. It is to believe in a love that is more than benevolence, a love that sets its desire upon each of us by himself and for himself, that is afflicted in our afflictions, wronged in our wrongs, wounded and grieved by our sins, that has gone to the Cross for us and sought us through the gates of Death and Hell. We are not ripples on the surface of an oceanic Absolute. We are not tools of a Great Artificer to be used until blunted and worn out, then flung aside. We are not God's workmen whom He may calmly bury, relay after relay, provided that the work goes on. We are his children holding each a place in His love which no substitute can ever occupy, to whom He has bound Himself with ties which not even sin, much less time, can sever. If we believe in God by Jesus Christ, if to our souls the Love of God which is in Him shines in its own light as the Supreme Reality, we are on the surest foundation as regards the life to come. We need no spiritualistic manifestations, no far-fetched metaphysical

reasonings. In Christ we have found God, a God whom frail, mortal and sinful as we are, we can trust, trust for ourselves, for those whom we love and for all men; trust for to-day and for to-morrow, for the great step into the unseen and for what lies beyond it, knowing that whatever unimaginable changes may be in store for mortals there, all of blessed and good each is capable of receiving He will ever bestow.

XIII.

OUT OF WEAKNESS MADE STRONG

There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.—*John iii: 1.*

Nicodemus saith unto them (he that came to Jesus by night, being one of them).—*John vii: 50.*

And there came also Nicodemus, which at first came to Jesus by night, and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, abo t an hundred pound weight.—*John xix: 39.*

THE story of Nicodemus is intended to illustrate what is one of the favorite themes of St. John's Gospel, the growth of faith. It is the story of a man who under the influence of Christ advances from timidity to courage; from weakness and indecision to moral strength.

It was the Passover season, and Jesus had signalized his visit to Jerusalem by expelling from the temple courts those who had turned the House of Prayer into a place of noisy and greedy traffic. This assertion of authority stung the official classes to keen resentment; but, on the other hand, it was followed up by a series of miracles which produced a deep impression on the popular mind. And when Nicodemus

This sermon was the last work of the late Professor Law. The manuscript was completed, but the sermon was never preached. On the Sunday when he was to have delivered it in Old St. Andrew's, Toronto, he was taken ill, and in a few days called to higher service.

found himself caught between these two currents of opinion he did the one right, wise thing there was for him to do. He resolved to enquire into the matter personally. And he went to the right source for enlightenment,—to our Lord Himself.

I. Thus we find Nicodemus as the cautious enquirer. Very cautious. It is characteristic that Nicodemus, seeking light, seeks it in the dark. Full of an anxiety he was unable to repress, yet was unwilling to reveal; unable to relieve his conscience, yet afraid to imperil his reputation; anxious at once to relieve his doubts and to preserve his dignity—one soft April night, when the city was asleep, he stole out of his house alone. Hurrying along the silent street he made his way to the lodging where he knew Jesus was.

And Jesus was meek and lowly of heart. He did not resent the clandestine visit. Though the soul of the man with his little snobbish fears and subterfuges was an open book to Him, He did not shut the door in his face. He did not say, "If you want to speak with me, you will find me in the temple courts to-morrow morning." When Nicodemus timidly knocked at the door, he found Jesus at home. Jesus is always at home to a soul who longs to speak to Him.

Then Nicodemus diplomatically begins: "Rabbi, we know that Thou art a teacher sent from God: for no man can do these miracles which Thou doest except God be with him." Of so much he was assured. At this point of certainty he had arrived. Jesus was a teacher sent from God. But it was not to tell Jesus this he had stolen out under the cover of night. And reading at a glance the great unspoken question in the man's heart, Jesus went straight to the centre of things—the Kingdom of God. "What you long to know," Jesus says in effect, "is this: Am I the Messiah? Am I here to set up the kingdom of God on earth? But there is another question that comes before that, a question about yourself. Are you fitted to enter this kingdom of God of which you dream? Are you ready to believe it, if it should come? Have you even any true notion of what the kingdom of God is? You have not. You could not recognize it if it were before you. You are dreaming of a political Messiah—a victorious king who is to deliver Israel from the Romans and set up the fallen throne of David. No, Nicodemus, you have been attracted to me by my miracles which is just as if you had been attracted to me by the dress I wear. You have no knowledge and no sympathy with my aims; no notion at all of the true Kingdom of God

which is the rule of the Father's Spirit in the souls of men, of the Father's will in the lives of men. My kingdom is beyond your range of vision. And I tell you, master in Israel though you are, that even to recognize that kingdom, much more to enter it and belong to it, you must be born again. Except a man be born of water and of the spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."

These words of our Lord to Nicodemus have been regarded as very mystical and mysterious. But I do not think that their meaning and their demand would be wrapped in any mystery for Nicodemus. "Born of water and the Spirit." That was just what John the Baptist had been thundering in the ears of all Judea. The Kingdom of Heaven was at hand, and he who would prepare for its coming must repent of his sins and forsake his evil ways and in token of his repentance must come down and be baptized in the Jordan. He must be born of water, and then would he be ready to welcome that Greater One who should baptize with the Spirit. And had not Nicodemus been one of the deputation from the Sanhedrin who were sent down to the Jordan to report upon John and his mission; had not his conscience been smitten by John's message; had he not trembled upon the brink of John's baptism? If only he had had the courage

before his brother magistrates to confess his sins and mingle with the crowd of penitent reprobates who went down into the river with the stain of their evil past upon them and came up out of the river like Naaman, cleansed, as it born again! Had he only been honest enough and brave enough he would have done this, and to-day we would have been counting up Peter, James, John, Nicodemus, as apostles of the Lamb. He was within one short step of the gate of the Kingdom at the Jordan; but he was not equal to facing such a loss of reputation and other things, as would have befallen him on the day he was publicly baptized. Nicodemus had not the strength of mind and heart to take up his cross, be born again. And so he went back to Jerusalem, retained his seat in the Council, and now comes by night to enquire about the Kingdom.

But Jesus, gentle and sympathetic as He was, could not make the gate of the Kingdom one inch wider than the stern Forerunner had done. Nicodemus had scarcely got his lips opened to pay his prepared compliments to our Lord when he was again met with that dreadful "water" which had haunted him like an accusing spirit ever since he had not gone down into it. "John told you what to do," Christ says to him, "and you would not do it; but I tell you that to the

day of your death and judgment there will be no other way to a new heart and new life for you than to do as your conscience bids you and confess your sins and be baptized of John before all Judea and Jerusalem." And that night, as Jesus shook hands with Nicodemus, letting him out into the night from which he had come, He said with a new and true accent he never forgot, "He that doeth truth cometh to the light that his deeds may be manifest that they are wrought in God." But Nicodemus crept back to his home and did not come to the light and in sleepless hours of remorse kept his wounded conscience, his place in the Sanhedrin, and his repute among men.

How much such men as Nicodemus lose! They lose all peace. They lose all self-respect. They have always an unquiet heart. To have peace one of two things is necessary. You must have no conscience; or you must have a conscience strong enough to rule you. The man who has a conscience, and yet not conscience enough to make itself obeyed, who has convictions but is afraid to let them govern him, who feels his need of God yet cannot bring himself to full surrender is one of the unhappiest of men. The most unenviable man in the Sanhedrin was Nicodemus, the halting and unresolved man. One pities men and women who are robbed of

the joy and gladness of youth; one commiserates still more those who make nothing of their later years and pass to their graves without tasting the good of life. But still more to be lamented is he who stands looking wistfully into the Kingdom of Heaven; who passes its gates time and again; catches the floating echoes of its music, feels angels' hands upon him urging him to come in, and yet has never entered. To be within sight of land and yet to remain on the rolling waves; to approach so near to all that for which we are made and yet to miss it, not accidentally but from lack of courage—that is the tragedy of Nicodemus and of many another. "Oh, the little more and how much it is; and the little less and what worlds away!"

II. A first opportunity may be lost. But God always rejoices to give a man another. And he gave another opportunity to Nicodemus. Nicodemus remained a member of the Sanhedrin. And what a torture that must have been to him—to sit there day by day and listen to all their outpourings of malignant hate against Jesus Christ, a privy to all the intrigues which Caiaphas and his fellows wove around Jesus and the snares they laid for Him,—to sit there and witness all that and take part in all that day by day, while in his soul he knew that Jesus was true and good—to feel his soul burning with

protest, aching to speak out while yet he kept silence—how he must have writhed under his misery and cursed his craven weakness.

One day it passed endurance. The Council were mad with hatred against Jesus. They had sent out their officers to arrest Him. After a time the men return without their prisoner. In reply to angry demands for explanation, they can only say, "Never man spake like this man." And when the exasperated rulers browbeat the men, crying, "Are ye also deceived?" Nicodemus, stimulated by the example of the very constables, finds his voice. "Doth our law judge any man before it hear him and know what he doeth?" It was a lame and impotent protest, feeble as a child's cry flung out against a storm. The Council contemptuously crushed it under foot. One scarcely knows how to characterize the part Nicodemus plays here. He makes an effort to be true and brave. If he does not make a stand, he, at any rate, puts in a word for fair play and justice. He so far braves the wrath of the Council. He almost confesses Christ in the presence of His enemies. But only almost. He is still keeping under cover. He is careful not to associate himself with the cause of Christ. He only rises to a point of order, as we say, takes refuge under a general principle of equity. He is in the unhappy position of the man who

says either too much or too little. Thereafter he is a marked man in the Council, a suspected traitor to his party. Yet he has won no triumph for the soul. In his conscience there is no "well done." It accuses him as a failure and a coward. And he goes down to his home with deepened remorse. If he had not wholly lost, he had not fully grasped his second opportunity.

III. But God always rejoices to give a man still another opportunity and He did to Nicodemus. Nicodemus seized it. The undecided man, the cautious enquirer, the almost confessor, receives a baptism of strength and courage at the cross. Not till then. He still clings to his seat in the Council—still as the associate of Annas and Caiaphas, who are pushing their battle against Jesus and pursuing Him to the death. Did he take part in the final acts? When Caiaphas openly proclaimed his intention of putting an end, once and for all, to the career of this mischief-maker, when the compact was made with Judas, when Jesus was led bound before the Council, and they brought on their hired perjurers to swear away his life? Let us suppose that Nicodemus found it convenient to be absent from these sittings of the Council. Without protest of his, at least, the deed is done. Jesus is crucified. Nicodemus had soothed his conscience; had buoyed himself on the assur-

ance that matters could never go to this tragical length. Providence would open up some way of escape. But the dark deed is done. No undoing it. No protesting against it now. What pangs of shame would now be his. "What a coward I have been: the meanest, the wickedest of men."

Was there no hope, no possibility even yet of rescuing something from the wreck of his life? No little deed by which he might even yet say, "Jesus, I love Thee. I have heard Thee slandered on every side, and, God judging me, I have listened to the slander and acted as if I believed it. I have seen Thee persecuted and forsaken and have stood by in guilty silence. Cannot I, even yet, do something for the honor of Thy name?"

It was granted to him. Nicodemus had lost his great opportunities irreparably—had lost the privilege of companying with Jesus, of listening to His words and being trained by His discipline. Nicodemus might have been an apostle—a pillar of the Church, a man mighty in word and deed for the Gospel's sake. All that honor and gladness and usefulness Nicodemus lost beyond recovery. In the after-writing he passes entirely out of sight. But this is recorded, this one significant thing. Had it not been for Nicodemus and another timid friend

to the truth, the dead Body of our Lord might have been taken down from the cross and cast into the valley of Hinnom along with the carcasses of the two thieves. But Joseph of Arimathæa and Nicodemus went boldly to Pilate and besought him to let them bury the dead, martyred Body that all other men had hid their faces from that day. And Joseph of Arimathæa and Nicodemus took the Body of Jesus and wound it in linen clothes with the spices as the manner of the Jews is to bury.

Are not the ways of men and the ways of God with men strange? Who will bury the dead Jesus? There is Lazarus whom He raised from the dead; there are the lepers he cured; the hungry multitudes He fed; those whose tears He wiped away—hundreds of them. Are there not half a dozen of them who will take down that dear body and lay it in some kind of grave and shed some tears over it? Not one!

Ah well; there are the people, the enthusiastic, interested crowd who but yesterday were crying, "Hosanna to the Son of David." Will they not go to-day and form themselves into a great funeral procession and carry their dead master with dramatic loyalty to His grave? No, not they!

Then what of Peter, the man who had witnessed the great confession, "Thou art the

Christ, the Son of the living God?" He is the man to bury Christ. But Peter and his followers have gone into hiding.

Now, who came forward? Who at the last moment show themselves loyal. It was this same Joseph of Arimathæa who had been a disciple, but secretly for fear of the Jews, and this same Nicodemus who at first came to Jesus by night. And what had transformed these men? What was it that brought them to the point when others had fallen back; when disaster had come, and shame and ruin, and the cause seemed lost? The Cross of Christ. Such is its power. "It makes the coward spirit brave, and nerves the feeble arm for fight."

Death is a great revealer. The night brings out the stars; the depth of the root is known in the act of tearing it up. And Nicodemus never knew how much he loved Jesus until he was crucified and dead. The Cross was for Nicodemus the altar of decision. It kindled in his heart a fire that burned out all timidity and doubt. Until this time of terror Nicodemus hid himself. Now the very terror wakes up love and makes faith dauntless. Surely Nicodemus is now born again—safely in the Kingdom by that only door of entrance—being born again.

Let us sum up in a word the lessons we have learned from this study. First, the prime need

of courage. It was from the lack of courage that Nicodemus went so near to losing his soul. And without courage none of us can be saved. No longer may we need courage to subdue kingdoms, stop the mouths of lions and quench the violence of fire. But we cannot very long steer a straight course, the course of loyalty to ourselves and to our God, without the same kind of courage. We may have convictions, but they will be only our burden, our condemnation unless we have the courage of them. Convictions, high ideals, good impulses avail nothing without *courage*. "Add to your faith courage."

And the second is that the supreme inspiration of courage is the Cross of Christ. It is with the Cross of Jesus going on before that God's soldiers must always march. It is so they always have marched to victory. It is the Cross of Christ that has led on the noble army of martyrs; and whenever courage like theirs has been displayed in the service of Christ, it is His Cross, His supreme sacrifice, His faithfulness unto death, that has begotten it. Mindful of "the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me," never shall we falter in courage. For Christ is not only there before us as a pattern, He is here within us as a power. We in Him and He in us, we may be *strong* in the Lord and in the power of His might.

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